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* Vera House.

San Bernabé Ranch.

Frontispiece.

A MEXICAN RANCH

OR

BEAUTY FOR ASHES

A PRIZE STORY

BY

MRS. JANIE PRICHARD DUGGAN

He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to them that are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all that mourn;
To give unto them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

ISAIAH 61 : 1–3.

PHILADELPHIA

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TO

THOSE FAITHFUL MISSIONARIES,

MY COLLEAGUES IN MEXICO, THIS VOLUME

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

BY

J. P. D.

Read February 1948

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INTRODUCTION.

THIS is not a true story in the sense that each character is a true representation of some real person who has said and done just what the characters of the book say and do. Nor are the facts stated matters of history in our Baptist annals. Perhaps there is no ranch of San Bernabé in the whole republic of Mexico.

Yet it is a true story in the sense that there have been missionaries in Mexico for over thirty years who have lived and toiled and preached and taught just as the missionaries of this story are represented as doing. There have been persecutions and mobs and burnings of mission houses; there have been long seasons of drought during the Lord's seed-times, which have ended in marvelous ingatherings at the harvest; there has been all this since the beginning of mission work in all foreign lands, and there will be to the end, and "the end is not yet"; there have been loving and marrying and hope and disappointment and death in the world from the day God's angel with the fiery sword first guarded against man the gates of Paradise, the abode of sinlessness and perfect happiness.

There are numberless ranches all over Mexico opening to the gospel, where men and women are needed to minister to the diseased souls and bodies of the peasants. In some there is not even the *adobe* mission schoolhouse, while in others, neat buildings have been raised to the praise of God and his Son.

As these lines are written, news comes that the ranch used as a model for San Bernabé has at last a new Baptist meeting-house, after several years of struggle toward this point; and this item also comes with the news: "Since beginning to use our new house, sixty hearers have been added to the congregation, without counting those who stand outside in the doorway and windows."

So "San Bernabé" at last has its mission church in truth, even though no chapel to "Our Lady of Solitude" had to be torn down to make way for it, and the work of the Lord prospers in that place just as if a Mary and a Roger Douglas were shepherds of the little flock folded there.

J. P. D.

WAKE FOREST, April, 1894.

PROLOGUE.

THE CHILD IN THE GARDEN.

THE old garden is gone now, with its gooseberry bushes and the long asparagus beds, and the crab apple-tree, whose delicious blooms enticed the bees and the humming birds as no other tree in the garden could. The long, shady arbor, reaching quite across the garden, and laden in the autumn with pink and purple grapes, swinging high above childish heads—this is gone too, along with the sunny stretch of green sward, bounded by the mint beds and the tansy plots. The gnarled, old apple-trees, the pippin and the "rosy-cheeked," have laid their heads low, and long past is the time when their sturdy limbs and spreading branches were Blue Beard's castle or brigands' strongholds and their leaves made garlands for fairy folk.

The child is gone too, yet both she and the garden exist still, as that far-away, ancient city exists, sunk beneath the waves of the northern seas. The waters surge and beat along the empty coast, once graced by the walls of the fair city; but the fisherman pauses as his boat rides the waves over the spot where the sunken city now rests, and fancies that he hears the evening bells

ring out from the church towers below and the voices of children in the streets calling to one another at play. In spite of the piles of stone and mortar, and the trim, graveled paths now occupying the old "home spot," she who was the child still wanders through the old garden, filled with the scent of blossoming trees and the singing of birds.

Perhaps her eyes are not so sharp and bright to-day as on those summer mornings when she trotted between the asparagus beds, a few steps in front of "grandpa," eagerly bent on spying and pointing out to him the tender, sprouting heads awaiting his keen knife. The curly head under the blue gingham sun-bonnet often grew damp and heated in the ardent sunshine, but grandpa could never find all the tempting bits of the tender asparagus without Mary's aid—of that the small maid was quite sure, and grandpa never tried to convince her of the contrary; perhaps, indeed, she was right, for the old man's step grew languid long before he would give up his daily pleasures in the garden—of noting the budding raspberry bushes, of straightening the rows of strawberry plants, or of breaking open the tarnished bloom of a peach-tree to see if last week's frost had killed the germ.

The snow was lying deep over every hillock and bed in the garden on the day when grandpa was carried away between the euonymus trees and

rows of box, never again to follow the child down the garden paths. The garden was never again quite so sunny as before; and after that, I think the blue sky always seemed a little nearer to the garden tree tops.

The odor of the rich, damp earth, freshly turned up by the plough, how even to this far-off day it is wafted back, and little Mary again digs her bare toes into the moist, brown clods, with small shrieks and shudders at the sight of the squirming earthworms thus suddenly brought to light.

Many a trampled trail through the oat patch told of strolls with the favorite boy-doll "Willy"; and the inner quake of fear is almost felt again at the realization that "Willy" is perhaps really lost amid the bowing grain, when the little mother has only laid him to sleep for a moment in a particularly inviting nest while she rambles on in search of a flower. Ah, silly child, your path back through the oatfield to your lost dolly is easier to retrace than you imagine, as you gaze ahead over the unbroken surface of grain before you. Looking back through the years now, my Mary, why is it that the long past, all tried as it has been, seems as unreadable and inaccessible as the short and untried future beyond? With our enlarged vision, our grown-up energies, our "evolved" tastes, is it ever possible to find our way back to that once prominent past, which was so vivid a present, and to stand in thought

and imagination just where once we stood in reality?

A long bench under the grape arbor, with the legs wanting at one end, made a delightful reclining seat in the green shade, and Mary, who had no wish for cushions and had never heard of hammocks, thought no place so inviting for reading, while the bees hummed overhead and the catbirds called to each other in the apple-trees; and "Marmion," "The Lady of the Lake," and the dear old illustrated edition of "Vanity Fair," are vivid memories of those early reading days.

The grass was soft and cool in the summer evenings, as the child, lying on her back, gazed up at the rosy clouds sailing overhead. There beset her then the same questions that puzzle the world still, and always will, but they were chased hither and thither in the small brain or driven into out-of-the-way corners by the sight of the slow whirl of the birds against the sky, enjoying their sunset pastimes, or by the peeping of the sleepy birdies in the nest in the apricot tree near by.

The questions remain,—yes, and they have grown broader and more comprehensive as the years have passed until they embrace the whole of the mystery of her life,—but the idle circling of a bird in the air does not now bring the calm and the patience that are needed; they come with the tiny whisper: "He knows; he knows."

A Mexican Ranch.

For my part, if I can put one touch of a rosy sunset into the life of any man or woman . . . I shall feel that I have worked with God. He is in no haste; and if I do what I may, in earnest, I need not mourn if I do no great work on the earth. Let God make his sunsets: I will mottle my little fading cloud. To help the growth of a thought that struggles toward the light; to brush with gentle hand the earth-stain from the white of one snowdrop—such be my ambition! So shall I scale the rocks in front, not leave my name carved upon those behind me!—*George Macdonald.*

CHAPTER I.

A MOUNTAIN WAIF.

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free?—Isa. 58 : 6.

"SEÑORITA! *Buenos dias.*" (Good-morning, miss!)

"Good-morning, Doña Martina. What a beautiful day we have."

"Very beautiful, señorita, and——Come hither, thou little vagabond, what dost thou hiding behind the door? Dost thou not see the Señorita *Americana* waiting here, and how can I explain to her if thou wilt persist in hiding thy face? Come hither, I say."

Mary Summers was on her way to open the door of the little mission schoolhouse, one bright morning in October, when she was arrested by the shrill voice of the Mexican woman whose hut she was passing. She stopped, wondering not a little that Doña Martina, who was known as one of the most fanatical women in the large ranch of San Bernabé, should have called to her thus publicly from her doorway. She showed none of her astonishment however, but awaited further developments, standing outside upon the

glaring white road which divided the ranch into two almost equal parts. After a few moments the "little vagabond" was hunted from his hiding place, and this time triumphantly presented by his mother to the teacher outside.

"Will you take him, *maestra?*"[1] she asked, looking with pride upon her son, a boy of seven years, who still hung back unwillingly, grasping the soiled skirt of his mother's dress.

"Certainly," replied Miss Summers, holding out her white hand and taking the small brown one of the child, "I shall be glad to have another boy as a companion for Carlos and Samuel. All the rest of my pupils are girls," she explained to the woman, who was examining with open admiration the fresh morning dress of the schoolmistress.

"Well, go along with thee, Juanito," said the mother, good-humoredly; "and mind the *maestra* in all things, or thou knowest what will happen on thy return."

Martina stood in the doorway of her small shanty, shading her eyes with her hand, as she watched the two walking briskly away from her along the road toward the tiny *adobe*[2] schoolhouse, a hundred yards away.

"I do not care," she muttered to herself, "they may say what they please. She is pretty and gentle, and her scholars are learning better than

[1] Schoolmistress. [2] A large sun-dried brick.

Don Gregorio's boys, who have been at their a-b abs for three months already. Of course she is a Protestant, but Juanito is young yet, and she will do him no harm. And who knows? He will be learning English soon, and then, some day, he will go to the States to work, and become a rich man, perhaps as rich as our Don Eduardo. Ah! I have many desires to see our Juanito a rich man. Hark," she continued, "the mistress is going to sing."

Heavy footsteps came behind her, shuffling over the uneven dirt floor of the hut, and a gaunt, unhealthy looking man joined her in the doorway, and opened his mouth to speak, just as a strain of music issued from the schoolhouse door. Mary Summers was playing on the tiny organ the opening bars of a hymn, and immediately her clear strong voice led the scholars in singing in Spanish, "What a Friend we have in Jesus."

Several forms appeared at the doors along the road nearer the schoolhouse than Martina's, and one or two listened until the entire hymn was sung. The ranch was very quiet at this time of the morning, as all the men who could work had long since gone to the adjoining plantations to gather in the bean crop, which was to form the principal food for their families during the coming winter. The boys who could be spared from this task were usually at this time huddled in Don Gregorio's schoolroom, just across the way from

the mission house, and some of the mothers and daughters were engaged in grinding the corn for the midday *tortillas* (Mexican corn cakes), while others went to the tiny rivulet on the outskirts of the ranch to do the weekly washing.

Usually Don Gregorio's boys were incited to louder study than usual, during the half-hour which Mary gave to the opening exercises of her little school, and their loud sing-song rendering of the *silabario*, or syllable-book, in concert, Mexican fashion, often drowned the feeble voices of Mary's youthful choir. This morning, however, Don Gregorio was late, and he came hurrying down the road from El Porvenir, a little neighboring ranch, just in time to hear the closing words of the song and to find his boys all clustered eagerly about the door of Mary's schoolroom.

Old Doña Çatarina, toothless and almost deaf, sat in the sun near the schoolhouse door and told her beads vigorously as the music floated past her dull ears, while farther on, a young woman nursing her baby caught up the words of the song, and gently crooned them into her little one's ear:

"Estas debil y cargado
De cuidados y temor?"

"Yes, Lord," she murmured, "thou knowest it. Thou knowest that I am 'burdened with care and fear.'"

"Take it to the Lord in prayer,"

sang the children.

A Mexican Washtub.

"Dear Jesus," she prayed, under her breath, "the little teacher says I may tell it all to thee. Thou knowest my fear of Pedro, and that he says he will take my Concha away from me and give her to the sisters in Hermosa, if I listen any more to the beautiful stories the little *maestra* tells. Tell me, Son of Mary, what shall I do?"

"You miserable little dogs!" screamed Don Gregorio, when he came within calling distance of his reprobate little flock, gathered outside of Mary's door; "I'll teach you how to sing another tune, that the little hypocrite in there knows nothing of. Come, come, I say, every one of you, and I shall give you a singing lesson of my own this morning."

"Poor little ones, poor little men!" sighed Mary to herself, as she closed the organ and opened her Bible for the morning lesson. Before she found her place for reading, sharp cries sounded across the road as the schoolmaster's keen lash fell swiftly upon the shrinking shoulders of one after another of the weeping children who had been caught in such dire disgrace. Don Gregorio and each small victim stood in full view of Mary and her band of adorers, on the opposite side of the street, and the sight proving too interesting to her children, she arose and closed the door; opening for light and air another, which looked out over the sunny prairie stretching toward the west.

The schoolhouse consisted of but one small room, with the customary dirt floor now worn into holes here and there by the dripping of water from the leaky roof in the rainy season. The room was also used as a meeting-house on Sundays for the Protestant people of the ranch, and was filled with rough wooden benches, and lighted by the two doors during the day, and by two or three kerosene lamps by night.

Mary's pupils filled two long benches, and had numbered nineteen until this morning, when Juanito made the twentieth. She took her seat in a low splint-bottomed chair, and opened her Bible, while her little scholars were all attention, for the cries across the way had ceased when she closed the door. Drawing Juanito close to her side, she read, slowly and clearly, the first seventeen verses of the tenth chapter of John, and then all joined with her in repeating, "Our Father." After this Mary offered a short, simple prayer of her own, in which she mentioned the new scholar's name.

When they arose from their knees, Juanito's bright eyes were fixed upon hers, and he laid a small hand upon her knee.

"Señorita," said he, boldly, "to whom were you talking about me? You said 'Juanito,' and there is no other Juanito here," looking up and down the line of girl faces, and pausing at the end of a bench where Carlos was sitting.

"I was telling our Father about you, little one," replied she, "and I asked that he would bless you and make you a good, obedient scholar, so that you might grow to be a great and useful man."

"Our Father is *God*, Juan," interposed Carlos. "Thou knowest nothing yet, but the señorita will teach thee."

"I know that thou art a little fool, Carlitos," returned Juanito; "every one says so, and I shall not stay here to be taught by *thee*." And throwing an indignant look upon his small associate, he was marching from the room.

"So you will leave us, Juanito," asked Mary, briskly, "just when we were going to look at some beautiful pictures of the most wonderful animals in the world? Well," she continued, "be sure and tell your mamma just how it was, and tell her that I am sorry you did not like to stay with us. Come, children," she continued, as she saw that the little fellow still lingered at the door, "you may each ask one question about the first picture, and we shall begin with Carlos, because he is the only boy we have at school to-day." This was said with a sorrowful glance at the already repentant Juan outside.

She then stepped to the end wall of the room and hung a brilliantly colored print of an elephant prancing through an Indian jungle, with very minute Indian huntsmen crouching behind the trees and grasses. By this time, Juan stood just

within the doorway and was devouring the bright picture with eager eyes, the other children being too absorbed in watching the teacher's movements to notice him.

"Now, Carlos," she said. And stepping near where Juan stood, she laid her hand upon his black curls. Question after question followed from the gay little class, and Mary's wits were kept busy answering the very wise, and often very foolish, queries that were put to her. Even Juan forgot himself so far as to ask if the elephant could swim, that art being the height of an ambition of his own as yet unattained. After the picture had been thoroughly discussed, the day's studies were begun with blackboard and slate exercises in arithmetic. Other lessons followed until the hubbub of the men returning from their work announced the hour of twelve, and then Mary dismissed her little school and all went to their respective homes for the two hours of intermission before the afternoon session. Mary walked with Juanito to his mother's door, where they found Doña Martina Vera eagerly awaiting them.

"Well, *maestra*," she cried, "will he do? Will my boy learn, and will he be a great man?"

"Ah, Doña Martina," was the reply, "how can I tell? Let him come to me every day, and I shall teach him and he will learn, and God will make him a good man, if he wishes to be good, and that is better than being great." She nodded

pleasantly to the woman and went on to her own house farther along.

Then Juanito recounted every incident of the day, dwelling with particular emphasis upon his encounter with Carlos, the son of one of the members of the little Baptist church. He and his whole family were held in great contempt by most of the Vera family, and for a moment the mother clenched her hand and was on the point of pouring forth a torrent of abuse upon the absent one's head, when she remembered her newly awakened ambition for Juan, and changing her manner, she said:

"Well, never mind Carlos, my only one; be more attentive than he, study harder than he, and thou wilt be a greater man than he. Now, tell me of the señorita; thou lovest her already, my son?"

"Ah, yes," he replied. "She is not cross as thou art, sometimes; and mother, she talked to some one who was not there about me, and said that I must be obedient, and that then I should be a great man. I am glad, for I am so tired of being small, and I wish to be called *Juan*, not *Juanito*."[1]

Meanwhile, Miss Summers had reached the great gateway leading into the courtyard of Don Eduardo's house, where she was spending her first year of mission life. She crossed the sunny space

[1] John, not Johnny.

between the gate and the door of her room very thoughtfully, and upon entering the dim little anteroom which led into her bedroom, she sat down in the first chair in her way, threw off her large shade hat, and resting her chin in the palm of her hand and her elbow on the table, fell into deep thought. In some respects, this fair October day, which had dawned bright and cloudless as all the other days of her stay at San Bernabé, gave promise of better things than she had dreamed of after the first few disappointing weeks of her life at the ranch.

Until to-day, her little school, the object of so much prayer and thought, had consisted only of the children of the baptized members of the small band of Protestants in the ranch; and while she labored joyfully with these, and had already endeared herself to the parents by her untiring care for the small brown bodies, as well as for the diminutive brains of their children, her own heart was aching over the "oppressed" mothers and daughters in the Roman Catholic faith, who had yet to realize the burdens oppressing them before they could be taught to even desire to enter the "glorious liberty of the sons of God." Now to-day, Juanito Vera had been given to her, and the recollection of his bright, brown eyes and the warm clasp of the little hand gave her a happy thrill of thankfulness.

"He *shall* love me," she exclaimed aloud, "and

through him I shall enter his mother's house, and through him I shall gain his mother's heart. I must work patiently and slowly." She raised her head as she spoke and became aware of a soft, dark eye fixed upon her from a small opening in the door, which served to let a little light into the windowless room. As she was about to speak, the eye and a shock of black hair were hastily withdrawn, and a clatter of dishes and tongues outside the door drowned her words of inquiry.

"The señorita! What dost thou want with the señorita? And who art thou, putting thyself and thy rags into this house? Dost thou not know that this is Don Eduardo's house, and that the dogs of *rancheros* stay outside unless invited to enter?"

The door was thrown hastily open and a young Mexican woman entered, bearing a waiter of covered dishes on one arm, while with the other she kept off a poor, emaciated creature, who tried to follow her into the room.

"Quick! Help me shut the door, Señorita María, or she will get in, and she is not fit——"

"Stand aside, Petra," returned Miss Summers, "and let me see who it is. Why, she is starving, poor thing; only look at these poor arms and hands!" And she bent, almost in tears, over the form of a young girl who had fallen prostrate across the threshold.

"Then, why did she not go to the kitchen, if

she wanted food? Go," she said, not unkindly, "to the *cocina*,[1] and I will give thee food, as soon as I have arranged the señorita's dinner."

"No, no!" gasped the girl. "The *maestra*—I came—over—the mountain—I am—sick—She will cure me——" She caught at Mary's dress with her dirty, claw-like fingers, and then fainted away. Petra, whose heart was not so hard as her words, brought the water that Mary called for, and bathed the poor dusty face and hands, while the teacher went to her medicine closet and poured a small quantity of a cordial into a glass. Mixing this with a little water, she gave it, a spoonful at a time, to the girl, who was already reviving, and in a few moments was able to raise her head and look about her.

"Now, Petra," said Miss Summers, "help me to carry her inside, and then we will give her a little soup, and she will sleep."

"Impossible, señorita," replied Petra, who, as eldest daughter of the house and faithful worshiper of the young foreigner, resented what she considered such an intrusion. "Let me take her with me. She can rest on my *petate*."

A look of pathetic appeal came from the sad, brown eyes, lifted to hers from the floor, and another clutch of the wasted fingers at her skirts decided Mary, and she told Petra to bring in a clean, new *petate* (a sleeping mat, woven soft and

[1] Kitchen.

thick), and together they lifted the slight form and placed it upon the mat, in a cool corner of the outer room. Here the poor creature lay, watching Mary with great, hungry eyes, as she crumbled a bit of bread into a cup of the broth which formed a part of her own dinner. Then, Petra having returned to her kitchen and the family dinner, Mary closed the door, and taking a low stool, sat beside the famished girl and slowly fed her from the cup of broth. The last spoonful was hardly swallowed before the heavy eyelids closed and the girl slept.

Then the young teacher sat down to her own dinner, tired and hungry, with the appetite that comes sometimes to healthy young people, after a busy morning's work. The snowy cloth and napkin, white china plate, silver knife and fork, and dainty goblet were among the few simple luxuries which the young missionary allowed herself in her far-away Mexican home, and incongruous as they often seemed, with the sometimes unappetizing Mexican food supplied from the kitchen of her host, she never omitted the smallest detail of her pretty table-service. Setting aside the remaining broth for the sick girl's needs, later on, she ate the toasted *tortillas* and baked beans, the deliciously prepared rice, and a dish of scrambled eggs, ending with a glass of goat's milk and a bit of goat's-milk cheese, and then pushed back her chair, wondering what she

was to do with her helpless-looking *protégé*, while absent at the afternoon school.

Who was she? Why had she come to her? were questions unanswerable so long as that deep sleep held her motionless and speechless.

When Petra returned for the dishes, she brought a pan of hot water, which she placed on a side table, and while gathering up the remains of the dinner, she examined the new-comer with half-unfavorable eyes. Mary was silently washing her plate, knife, and fork in the water which Petra had brought, watching quietly on her part the face of the good-natured Mexican woman, who she knew would not long hold out against the pitiful creature in the corner.

Petra spoke first, and softly:

"She looks very tired, señorita. What shall we do with her?"

"Leave her where she is, for the present," replied Mary, as softly. "She will probably sleep all the afternoon. When she wakes she must have a bath and something clean to put on, in the place of these rags. After that she will tell me what she wants of me."

"A *bath*, señorita, and she so weak and sick; it will kill her!"

"No, Petrita. You will see that it will not kill her. And you will help me about this, I am sure. Get one of the boys to draw water for the bath, and in a few hours the sun will warm it

nicely. By the time I return from school it will be ready and she will probably be awake. Let her sleep, Petra, I have no medicine so good for her in my closet as this sleep will be. Be so kind as to look in upon her occasionally, while I am away. And remember, my dear," she concluded, "this poor creature may be one of the 'very least' of the Lord's servants, of whom we were reading last night, and we could not hesitate to do it for *him*, if he lay there sick and travel-worn, would we?"

"At least let me lock the door between your rooms, *señorita mia*," said Petra. "For we really do not know who she is, and it can do her no harm. Yes, I'll look after her," she continued, more graciously, lifting the waiter from the table, "and I suppose she will have to stay where she is for the present, though I would rather have her out of here. Señorita, you do not understand. Her clothing is full of *animals*, and——"

"Never mind now," returned Mary, with a shudder. "We will attend to all that when she awakes. Close the door and leave her now, and I must hurry off to school."

A hot wind was blowing over the plains, and the glare from the road was so blinding that Mary almost stumbled along the short stretch that lay between her rooms and the schoolroom. Juanito was shyly awaiting her as she passed his

cottage, but his hand was unwashed and greasy now, and the little, coarse white shirt that had been immaculate in the morning, showed signs of "bean gravy" down its front. Nothing, however, could dim the brightness of the eyes lifted to hers, and she sent him gayly on ahead of her to ring the bell that was hung between two posts, just outside the schoolroom door. The children were a little less punctual than in the morning, and only a dozen finally collected in the hot, little room, and settled restlessly on the hard benches in front of Mary's chair and table.

"Oh, dear! Sara, why did you bring the baby?" exclaimed Mary, as a fretful cry sounded from beneath the cotton scarf thrown around the head and shoulders of the largest of the girls, a child of thirteen years. "You know I told you to stay at home with him if you could not leave him, for you cannot study with him in your arms, and he makes all the rest laugh. You would better take him home, Sara."

"Oh, señorita," protested the child, "he will be quiet to-day, because he is sick. He has hardly cried at all to-day, mamma says, and she told me to bring him because she had to go to the river, and papa is very drunk to-day, and I was afraid to stay."

"Herculano drunk again!" said the teacher, with a sigh. "Well, stay, of course; but if the baby cries, you must take him out in the shade. Per-

haps he will sleep, poor thing!" she murmured, as she turned back the shawl and saw the pale face of the sick child, a pretty baby of a year.

He did sleep soon, and Sara laid him on the floor, with her scarf for a pillow. By-and-by he awaked, and grew so restless that Mary was forced to dismiss them from the room for the remaining hour of lessons.

She made the exercises as simple and interesting as possible that afternoon, and at four o'clock the children gathered about her, each eager to repeat the Bible verse learned the afternoon before.

When Juan's turn came, she was about to teach him a short verse, when, to her amazement, he opened his red lips and repeated one of the verses she had read to the children in the morning: "Yo soy el buen pastor: el pastor su alma da por las ovejas."[1]

"Juanito's papa is a shepherd, señorita," explained the irrepressible Carlos. "That is why he likes that verse."

"And who is the Good Shepherd, Juanito?" asked Mary tenderly of the little boy.

"My papa is a shepherd, but he is not good," replied Juanito, sadly.

"You asked me this morning to whom I was talking about you in the prayer; you remember,

[1] "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep."

Juanito. It was the Good Shepherd, dear, and you are to be one of his little lambs, one of the *new* little lambs, because you are just beginning to learn about him. Now, before we go home, we will sing about this Good Shepherd. All of you know the first verse by heart. Come."

"Oh, I am glad we shall sing that song," said Sara, who had returned at the first sign of bustle in the room, "because little brother likes it so much. He always knows when I sing it." And she hugged the small figure in her arms, and no weariness showed in her face, although her thin arms must have ached, small as their burden was. In truth, the baby did look brighter, and waved his arms in the air approvingly, as the children's voices joined in the song, which was the twenty-third Psalm in easy rhyme :

"Jesus es mi pastor
Nada me faltará.
Su deleitosa paz,
Me regocija ya," etc.

As she locked the schoolhouse door when the children were gone, a dismal chanting sound issued from the opposite schoolroom, and again she sighed, "Poor little fellows!" as she remembered that an hour or two more would be required of them in that dingy room while the master slept, to be awakened by any cessation in the sleepy droning of the scholars.

Sara and Her Little Brother. Page 32.

"I wish it was to-morrow already, *maestra*," said Juanito, as she was leaving him at his door. "You will call me *Juan* always, will you not, señorita?" he added.

"Yes, indeed, little man," she replied. "*Adios*,[1] *Juan*, and be ready to ring the bell for me to-morrow," she called, as she hurried away.

[1] Good-bye.

CHAPTER II.

THE WAIF'S STORY.

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.—Matt. 25 : 40.

THE sick girl lifted her head as Mary entered the room where she lay, and a lovely smile broke over her face. Mary nodded cheerfully to her and, then without speaking, lighted a small oil stove standing on the side table. Then, after pouring the remains of the broth into a tin pan and setting it on the stove, she went into the bedroom which opened out of the other. From a trunk she selected a complete suit of clothing, half-worn, yet whole and clean. These, with a cake of soap and towels, she carried out to the curtained corner of the yard, where stood the bath, an immense earthenware tub, full of sun-warmed water. Leaving the articles in care of Petra, who was sitting with her sewing near by, awaiting the victim of the bath, the young teacher returned to the house and found the broth hot and the invalid sitting up, watching the steaming pan with eager eyes.

"You may feed yourself this time," said Mary, handing her a cupful of the soup and a couple of

tortillas; "then you may rest again for an hour before taking your bath."

Mary then busied herself in the inner room for a while and left the sick girl again in quiet.

When Petra came to report that all was ready, and that she had added a little hot water to take the chill from the bath, the girl arose feebly and, with Petra's assistance, disappeared behind the curtains. Mary smiled as she realized what the extent of her influence must be to induce a sick Mexican to walk uncomplainingly to a bath tub. The use of water in sickness is considered by them to be very dangerous, the hands and face of a fever patient being left unwashed for weeks. And even in health, though in most Mexican towns there are ample and luxurious public baths, the average citizen considers the weekly bath sufficient.

A very subdued, though very clean, young girl limped back to her mat a half-hour later. Her black hair hung in long, wet strings over her shoulders, and Mary found her face and hands so chilled, and her lips so cold and bloodless, that she administered a little more of the cordial and water.

Then she learned from her the following simple story, which was supplemented by facts learned months afterward from the missionary himself:

A month before, Mr. Richards, the senior missionary, having his headquarters at S——, the city of which San Bernabé was a branch mission,

had passed through the little hamlet of Las Bellas Flores, on the opposite side of the mountain bounding San Bernabé on the east. Here he had held a preaching service in the evening, as was his custom on his mission tours, whenever a room and lights could be had. He had been attracted by the sight of a feeble, emaciated girl who crouched on the floor near the door and eagerly listened to the songs and to his simple sermon. After the sermon, he had made inquiries of his host in whose house he had preached and learned that the girl was Refugio Aguirre, and that she was an orphan, living with cousins, who, as was evident from the girl's condition of body and dress, were none too willing to give her support. Some even said that Refugio was but half-witted, and was not worth the scraps of *tortillas* thrown to her every day by her grudging relatives. This intelligence surprised Mr. Richards very much, for he thought he had discovered, as the most redeeming traits of the Mexican character, their loyalty to blood relations and charity to suffering friends.

"Oh," remarked the host, when Mr. Richards had expressed this surprise to him, "this case is different. We do not know exactly how it is, for the Aguirres are silent folks; but the fault is not Refugio's, though only she is left to bear the blame. Now they say that she is going into a decline, but my wife says that it is only hunger

that pinches her cheeks, and unhappiness that gives the stupid look to her eyes. She has been taught to read, but little good that does one when the stomach is always empty."

"Poor child!" said the missionary. "Here would be work for Miss Summers, if only a mountain did not stand in the way."

The next day, as he stepped out into the sunny *plaza* upon which his host's door opened, he almost stumbled over what at first seemed a heap of rags lying beyond the door sill.

"Ah, Refugio *mia!*" he exclaimed, recognizing in a moment the soft, liquid eyes raised appealingly to his own. "What are you doing, little one, lying on the ground? Come with me, and while we sit upon the seat in the *plaza*, you will tell me what ails you."

Her first question, as they sat side by side near the brink of the little dripping fountain, was a surprise.

"Would he cure me too, that man, and would he help me to sin no more, *maestro?*"

Seeing that the girl must be thinking of the simple discourse of the night before, he humored her direct simplicity and followed her lead without further introduction.

"Certainly, my dear child. If he were walking right by us now, and if you should ask him to cure you, he could do so, and I have no doubt he would."

"But he is not here," she replied. "You said that he is dead. Oh, I do not want him to be dead; I want to be well!" she moaned.

"Did you suppose that the Lord Jesus is really dead, Refugio? But then you have only seen the form of the dead Jesus on the cross," he added.

"Jesus! Yes," replied the girl, scornfully. "Much good he has ever done me! Were you telling us about *him* last night? If I had known that, I would not have stayed a moment," she ended, passionately.

"But I called him by the names by which we know our Lord, Refugio. You heard me?"

"Oh, yes, you spoke of Jesus; of course one must in a sermon; but you also told of a man who loved bad, sick people more than he loved himself, who touched them with his own hands when they were foul with disease, and who talked with them when they were so wicked that even their own relations would have nothing to do with them. And I knew that could not be Jesus, for he is only a picture or a piece of wood shaped like a man, and he is always so angry that the Mary mother has to beg him to let us enter heaven where he is. Now, *I* would rather go where the others go, even if it be to the *infierno*,[1] than te have to beg my way to heaven of Mary."

"Ah," thought Mr. Richards, as the girl paused for breath, and then left his side to seize the tin

[1] Hell.

dipper hanging by the fountain and drink feverishly of the clear, cold water, "what depths of neglect have brought this child to such a condition and such thoughts! If her relations do not care any more for her than they seem to have done, they will be glad to be rid of her, and I shall find some means of carrying her to Miss Summers on my next trip through here."

Then, when the girl returned to his side, he, as gently and as simply as possible, tried to remove her great misconception of the character of the Saviour, and made her promise that she would pray to him and to him alone until he should see her again. He told her of the beautiful young lady across the mountain at San Bernabé, of how she loved the Mexican women, of her skill in nursing the sick, and of the beautiful songs she sang.

"The Saviour is dead, Refugio, as you say; that is, he is not here in the body as he was when he went about on the earth doing good, but he still lives in heaven and in Christian people like the Señorita María. She could teach you better than I. Would you like to go to San Bernabé and live with her, and learn to be like her and help her to do the Saviour's work?"

"Oh, I should almost die of happiness!" gasped the poor girl.

The missionary now saw that his horse and servant were ready, and after promising Refugio

that it should not be many weeks before he should see the Señorita María, he had to leave her.

"But I could not wait, señorita," continued Refugio from her mat, where she sat hugging her knees and gazing into Miss Summers' sympathetic face. "I prayed to the Lord every day,—oh, many times a day,—and his voice seemed to be always calling me to go over the mountain to find you. Then I hid the scraps of food my *tia* (aunt) gave me each day until I had a handkerchief full of them, and one day I started off without saying anything to anybody. I heard a girl calling to me as she stood at the fountain filling her *jarro* (jar) with water: 'Where art thou going, crazy Cuca?' But I pretended not to hear her; and then I walked and walked till I fell down with weariness, and all night I coughed."

"You poor girl!" said Mary, taking the thin hand in hers and softly stroking it. "How long were you on the way?"

"Who knows?" she replied. "I walked when I could, sometimes in the day, sometimes in the night. One whole day and night, I know, I lay under a great pine tree, and had not the strength to crack the *piñones*[1] that covered the ground, and that would have been such fine food. I followed the road always, and to-day, when I came in sight of the houses, I think I fainted, for afterward I found myself lying in a large briar bush, and I do

[1] A small nut borne by the pine tree.

not know how I came there. Then I prayed tc God to give me the strength to get here, for though I did not know, I was almost sure that this was San Bernabé. And so I found you, señorita. You will not send me back again?" she cried, her eyes dilating with dread as this new possibility was thrust upon her.

"No, indeed, Refugio," replied her friend, "for I believe, like you, that God has sent you to me. And if you will do what I tell you, I feel that you will grow strong and well once more. Now, if your hair is dry, lie down again until supper time, and I shall go and speak to Doña Raquel about keeping you here with me."

Miss Summers found Raquel on her knees before the *metate*, a slightly hollowed out stone, upon which with another stone, she was kneading the *masa*[1] for the supper *tortillas*.

Doña Raquel was Eduardo's wife, and was a fine-looking specimen of the Mexican countrywoman. She looked up with pleasure as Mary addressed her, and Petra, hearing her voice, appeared in the kitchen doorway. After hearing the teacher's account of the new arrival, and after some discussion between mother and daughter, Doña Raquel agreed that Refugio should sleep on a mat in Petra's room, and that she should take her meals in the Vera kitchen.

"When she is stronger, she will help you,

[1] Dough made from the crushed corn.

Petra, in bringing my meals and in caring for my rooms." To this remark, Petra's only reply was a grunt, that showed lack of appreciation, to say the least.

"She is nothing but bones," declared Petra, after a pause. "Her skin must be tough to hold them together. But she is clean now," she added, grimly, "though I think you will have to let me cut off her hair, señorita. Her head is full of sores, which cannot be cured with that heavy suit of hair."

"Of course, it must be done," replied Miss Summers, with a shiver. "We must attend to that tomorrow. Now she must rest as she is half-dead with fatigue. Give her as much milk as she can drink for her supper, please," she finished, "with bread and an egg, but nothing fried or greasy, and then she can go to bed in your room. And Petra," she added, as she drew nearer the woman who stood in the kitchen doorway, "I think you need not lock the door between my rooms again. I am not afraid that our little guest will harm anything, for I am sure the Lord has sent her to you and me, and we shall begin by trusting her." With a bright smile the young teacher left them to their work, and crossing the court went out of the gateway, and soon left the ranch behind her, as she walked toward the prairie edge for her customary evening stroll.

"Ah, she is a beauty!" exclaimed Raquel,

rapturously, as she looked admiringly after her. "The holy virgin must have looked like her. And the Mary Mother herself could not have a kinder heart. Do you know, Petra, although she is a Protestant, I wake in the night sometimes and feel that we have a saint under our roof. And the thought of her sweet face drives away the old fears of trouble that I have had for so long. The virgin will not let any harm come to thy father and thy brothers now that an angel stays with us and guards us. What thinkest thou?"

"That thou art half a Protestant already, *madrecita*,"[1] answered Petra, laughing as she turned back to her kitchen fire. "Hast thou thought what thy confession will be when *Padre* Esteban comes here again? What will he say to the pretty Protestant *gringa?*[2] That is what I am thinking of, while we go on worshiping her, bless her heart!"

Raquel only shook her head, and went on with her grinding. Petra hummed an evening song to the virgin, to which her mother's steady strokes kept time. Little Benjamin, just three years old, and the idol of his aged father, tumbled in the sand with a couple of puppies, while chickens, pigs, and ducks roamed peacefully about the court. Refugio, in her corner, with the door opened upon the peaceful scene, thought she was in heaven. Catching up Miss Summers' handkerchief, which

[1] Little mother. [2] Foreigner.

had fallen near her, she pressed it to her lips, and then closing her eyes in utter content, again fell asleep. She waked with difficulty for her supper, to which Petra, half led, half carried her, and was hardly installed again on her mat in Petra's little room, before she sank into the most profound and health-giving slumber, and she did not wake until the morning.

CHAPTER III.

LOOKING BACKWARD.

You must need
Be more earnest than other men are,
Speed where they loiter, persist where they cease.

THE sun was sending long golden rays straight across the prairie as it seemed to be poised for a moment just at the horizon line, where there came a break in the hills. Mary shaded her eyes with her hand as she faced the dazzling ball, and stumbled on unseeing, tripping now and again over the little hillocks scattered far and wide over the plain. The hot October day was ending, and the young woman had left the ranch far behind her and had wandered out over the plain stretching westward, in search of a whiff of fresh air, free from the dust and the closeness which had clogged her ill-ventilated little schoolroom all day. The sun dropped out of sight and instantly a shady coolness spread over the scene. The great mountains in the east rose immediately behind the large ranch of San Bernabé, and the range extended at varying heights north and south, completely encircling the vast plain, except in the west. Here the two extremities of the range swept

aside and apart from each other, leaving an uninterrupted view of the western sky to the horizon line. Mary sank down on the absolutely dry sand of the prairie and took off her hat that the evening breeze might cool her heated brow and flushed cheeks. It had been an unusually hard day, but the soft colors of the sunset sky, the refreshing wind, and the cheery barking of the prairie dogs almost at her elbow, easily diverted into more cheerful channels the current of her thoughts.

"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem," she murmured, clasping her hands over her knees and fixing an earnest gaze upon the blue-black summits behind the ranch. "San Bernabé is not Jerusalem," she continued, smiling a little, as her gaze shifted to the flat, dirt-covered roofs of the little one-storied houses forming the ranch; "but the Lord is round about his people everywhere, and surely there are some who are his even here."

She was speaking aloud now, in the security that the utter silence and loneliness of the plain gave her. She had learned to talk much to herself during these months of her isolated life at the ranch. As she sat in the gloaming which was stealing over her, while the colors of the sky paled to a soft, silky blue, shot in the west with a rosy pink, and the mountains loomed larger and darker opposite, her thoughts sped back over months of time and leagues of distance, and, as if by the powerful gleam of a search light, the way

by which she had come was shown in all its changing lights and shadows.

She had not been a remarkably good child, although she could never remember the time when she did not long "to be good." Reared in a Christian home, where piety was expressed more in the doing than in the saying, the religious sentiment had taken deep hold of her childish conscience and imagination long before the older ones had begun to realize that she could be conscious of the worth of a soul.

Her dear old grandfather allowed her to play at his feet with her dolls under his great writing desk, never guessing that after tucking "Patty" and "Willie" and the rest away for oft-repeated and convenient slumbers, the small mother would cuddle silently beside them, going over in her mind questions like these: "Who am I? How am I different from my doll Patty? Who made me different?"

The parable of the prosperous farmer whose barns would not hold his crops always impressed little Mary most vividly. "This night thy soul shall be required of thee," seemed words too awful to be spoken aloud. What was this thing, the taking of which was to cause dire confusion and ruin to the poor man's plans? Had she one? Yes; the "Hymns for Infant Minds" all taught that. What was it? Had it wings? Was she afraid of it?

Her father had died when Mary was but a baby, and the grandfather's house became the home of the widowed mother and orphaned children. Mother and brother and sister soon followed the father, but Mary lived on in the dear old home where the crab apples bloomed and the asparagus sprouted and the violets scented the air, year after year, until only the grandmother remained of all the loved home circle, and the yellow-haired maiden grew to young womanhood. Always the questions crowded thick and fast in the busy brain through the years of study; at first in the home, seated on the little cricket at grandmother's feet; then in college halls, where she spent four years of earnest effort; and then, when all was completed, and she came home to her own pleasant chamber up among the boughs of the apricot trees, she found the questions still unanswered.

The questions were different now. They ran more like this: "All is mine—youth, health, education, time, and *a soul.* What shall I do with them? I am like the man whose barns were full. *And my soul will be required of me too*, some day; that part of me that knows, that will live; that part which I can make great and beautiful, or small and mean. Oh, I must study and I must grow, and the soul that God has given me will go back to him a finished, perfect thing when it has done with the body."

So she built her barns and worked on, but some-

how her soul did not seem to grow, though no one knew it but herself, for the grave-eyed, white-browed young woman was as dear and necessary in the lonely house as the quiet, sweet-faced child had been.

After a while, Mary began to ask herself: "What is it all for? To what purpose is all this striving? Of my abundance should I not give to those who lack?"

And one night, as she lay in her bed watching the moonlight shimmering on the apricot leaves outside of her window, she remembered the night of her baptism, many years before. As her pastor had raised her from the water, he had whispered: "My child, from henceforth study the will of your Master as the law of your life. What will you do with the responsibilities he has put upon you in making you what you are?"

There had been no time for an answer to the question; perhaps none was expected just then. Now, as she lay thinking, amid the silence of the great house, she knew that she must find an answer to that question which really embodied her heart's most earnest longing.

Before putting out the light, she had been reading several chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the coming kingdom of the Messiah, and now, in a flash, certain clauses occurred to her mind out of the verses just read: "To bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives,

and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ; . . . to comfort all that mourn ; . . . to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." What a career such would be!

Mary started up in bed and in an instant stood by the open window looking out into the glorious moonlight. With clasped hands and eyes brimming with tears she cried :

"Oh, my Master, here am I! Do with me according to thy will. I am thine alone and all I have is thine. Send me, if it be thy will, 'to proclaim liberty to the captives.'" And she knelt, sobbing, upon the floor by the window.

The morning broke and all the pleasant sounds of the summer went on in trees and garden, while Mary still slept. A quiet peace had succeeded the excitement of the early hours of the night, and she had fallen asleep some time after midnight, with a fixed, calm resolution to become a foreign missionary.

There came no wavering the next day, nor the next. Uncle Will Summers and his wife, whose eyes were sharper than grandmamma's, wondered at the increased gentleness of the girl's demeanor and the strange light in the dark eyes, which seemed to have grown darker and more thoughtful than ever in the past few days. These two had come to make their home with Mrs. Summers when Mary left for school, and a tiny little Mary

had come to gladden the old house with the sound of baby laughter, and by-and-by with the pattering of baby feet. Mary felt that she could be the more easily spared as this bit of a girl was fast taking her place in the mind of the aged grandmother, who lived over Mary's babyhood in the merry deeds and lisping words of the second Mary.

Two years before, she had visited Mexico in company with a party of friends, and had been sadly impressed by the degradation of the women and their entire ignorance of the simplest laws of health, yet infinitely more impressed by the utter thralldom in which they were held by their superstitions, miscalled religion. There had been only slight opportunities for judging of this, as her way had been through the larger cities, where the vice and poverty are somewhat hidden from the tourists' eyes, and the days had been spent in visiting cathedrals, museums, or ancient ruins. But she saw enough of dirt and bodily disease to guess at the depths of moral corruption which must have sway over priest-ridden souls, and many a lovely bit of scenery from the car window was spoiled for her by some hard, evil woman's face lifted to hers from the station platform, or by a glimpse of some pitiful deformity in a little child, from whose face even, innocence seemed to have flown. Mary's friends laughed at her "sensibility" and ridiculed her for her interest in the miserable beggars thronging the railroad stations.

"It is sin," she would say to herself, "that has done it all. Generations of sin; and the babies must bear their fathers' and mothers' sins, before they are old enough to feel their inherited tendency to sin!" Still, she had come home after this and had gradually ceased to think of it at all, until that summer night when the message had come to her "to give unto them beauty for ashes; . . . to proclaim the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

The Mexican women in their dirt, and sicknesses, and sin seemed calling to her, and to Mexico she resolved to go.

Friends had demurred at first, and grandmother had wept tears of sorrow which were soon, however, wiped away in order to see and laugh over the antics of Baby Mary; but the Board had gladly, if wonderingly, accepted the offer of Miss Mary Summers, of Summers Hall, to be sent as missionary teacher to the women and girls of Mexico. They had made a rigid examination into the young girl's creed, and her motives for going to a foreign field, and among most satisfactory answers, there were a few that were perhaps a little startling to the members of the Board, composed of staid ministers and deacons. One old man, a senior deacon in her own church, had asked:

"What first led you, Miss Mary, to think of being a missionary at all?"

"The thought of all that God has given me, contrasted with the want and suffering of the world."

"Humph, my dear young lady, and of all that God has given you, what is it that you mean to carry to your field of labor? Your wealth? You know that it requires most judicious management of money to make it serve the best purposes, especially among a nation of beggars?"

"I shall not carry my wealth, sir, but only what that has given to me and made of me. I shall give myself; I have had opportunities which others have not had. These have troubled me with the weight of responsibility which they have brought, and I cannot rest."

"You are young," suggested the silver-haired deacon, "and—and beautiful," he was about to say, but instead added, "and there is much to attract you in your life at home. Can you give it up?"

"I have given it up, already," she replied to her old friend with a bright look. "I know I shall miss many things, but I am ready to bear what my Saviour did, for his sake."

"Why have you thought of Mexico, Miss Mary?"

"Because I know something of the dreadful condition of the women and girls in that country," she returned. "Of course, I know of the moral degradation caused by the Romish Church from

reading and hearsay, but I have seen with my eyes the physical suffering and want among the poorer classes, and I wish to go among these."

Then Miss Summers, in a few simple words, told her plans for the next two years; she would enter a charity hospital, and take a two years' course in nursing before going to Mexico, studying meanwhile the diseases peculiar to that country, and to little children in general.

After some thoughtful discussion, the committee approved this plan, and Miss Summers was accepted as missionary of the Mission Board, to enter upon her work in Mexico at the end of two years.

The two years passed, and she had come to Mexico, and spent one year in S——, which was the most promising of the Baptist mission stations; where crowds attended the preaching of the gospel; where the mission school was well-appointed, and every seat filled with children, from the higher classes as well as from the lower; and where there was a large corps of mission workers. For one year she had lived in the midst of this busy hive, studying the Spanish language and longing for some work to do. Every duty was so accurately apportioned to each member of the household, that there was nothing left for the new-comer to do, and though her heart ached to be able to speak to the natives, and tell them of the love that had constrained her to come among them, yet her ignorance of the language forbade

it. After several months of study, however, she could use Spanish sufficiently to make herself understood, and then at her earnest solicitation, she was taken by a senior missionary on a missionary tour of several ranch churches. San Bernabé seemed to need her; the little dirty, unkempt children fell in love with her, the mothers held her pretty soft hand, and told of troubles at home; and finally she begged to remain there, when the missionary left to continue his travels. Reluctantly he had consented, convinced how great her influence would be, in just such much-needed work in the feeble little ranch church, yet not convinced of the wisdom of leaving so young and untried a person in the midst of such unpromising circumstances.

Miss Summers' quiet determination and cheerful arguments won the day, and he had driven off one morning just as the sun appeared over the crest of the mountain-top, leaving her figure standing out in the middle of the white, dusty road, watching the creaking diligence, as long as there was anything of it to be seen. The understanding was that she was to return to the city, sixty miles away across the plains, the next week if she should become too lonely to bear the solitude. The next diligence, however, bore no home-sick girl to the college doors in S——; instead, a letter arrived, begging that her trunks and books be sent by the returning coach.

Six months had passed, and the young missionary sat alone on the prairie, with the night closing around her, thinking of the last days in her home. She almost wondered at her own strength of purpose in giving up everything that had made the beauty of her life, and accepting in its place, utter uncongeniality, real privations and discomforts, loneliness and discouragements never imagined possible. Yet a smile hovered about her lips, as she watched the great bright face of the moon peering at her over the mountain peak behind the ranch, and she arose, giving herself a little shake, moral as well as physical.

"After all," she murmured, "one can only do one's best, and—why there goes the horn for supper, and I must hasten."

And hasten she did, over stones and prairie-dog hillocks, with the quick, springing run of a deer, toward the lights beginning to twinkle here and there in the little hamlet.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE OF VERA.

Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister and mother.—Mark 3 : 35.

MARY SUMMERS had been six months at the ranch and had, little by little, unraveled what had first seemed the hopeless tangle of Don Eduardo Vera's family connections. The old man was now eighty-one years old, and his personal appearance was not more patriarchal than his position as head of the ranch community. Married at eighteen, he had buried several wives, and Raquel, the present wife, was not more than half his age. It was computed that he was the father of thirty-five children, the eldest of whom, Daniel, was now over sixty years old, a grandfather himself, and having a son in the Mexican army. The youngest son of Don Eduardo was but three years old, a funny little miniature of his old father, and the pet and pride of father, mother, nieces, and nephews.

Many of the children had moved from the ancestral home at San Bernabé, establishing communities of their own, either in ranches or in the neighboring cities, so that the family name of

Vera was perhaps the most widely known of any in North Mexico. They were generally prosperous, and easily assumed the lead wherever they were thrown, from Don Eduardo, who owned San Bernabé and half a dozen other neighboring ranches, with the richest pasture land and the finest flocks of any one in the country, to the dashing young captain, son of Daniel. All of the sons and daughters, except Petra, José, and the young Benjamin, had married, some below their own social position, others, in a few cases, above it.

To Miss Summers it seemed as if every one in the ranch was cousin to his neighbor, and that most were connected, more or less, with their head. The very lowest and poorest of the inhabitants were the hired laborers and servants of those who also served and labored, for there were few idlers at San Bernabé in the busy season before the rains, and the sons and daughters of the laboring class, as they grew to maturity, coveted no higher honor than to serve those whom their grandparents and parents had served.

Don Eduardo was too infirm now for work, but his eye was still keen, except on Sundays and holidays, when he usually gave himself up to drowsiness and sleep; and he could still mount a pony and ride out among his family and servants engaged in harvesting or shepherding. There was very little money paid as wages to the laborers, as the great plantations were worked on a most

intricate system of "shares" of the crops, and of this and keeping the accounts of the profits and losses, José had entire charge. The ranch consisted of a hundred or more small huts, with here and there a better built house, indicating the residence of a Vera. The huts were built of *adobe*, and had often only a rough opening in one side for a door, closed by a flapping mat. The roof was a thatching of the tough leaf of the Spanish dagger, and the chimney simply a hole in the roof.

Men, women, children, dogs, and poultry often inhabited one room, with the baby swung up high in a shallow box, suspended from the roof. In warm weather and during the ten dry months of the year, these houses were needed only for sleeping purposes, as the men lived in the fields during the day, and the women and children worked and played outside in the bright sunshine. The young teacher often shuddered at the thought of what life must be in those hovels when the wintry blasts swept down from the mountains, and snow and hail and rain came hurtling across the prairie.

Don Eduardo's house was situated in the center of the ranch, and consisted of a dozen rooms built around two sides of a wide open court, whose other sides were bounded by a high stone wall. The house was of one story and built of stone, stuccoed with a white plaster and roofed with boards, upon which cartloads of earth were packed. Most of

the doors and windows opened upon the court inside, and at night when the great gates of the court were closed and barred, Don Eduardo and his immediate retainers were shut up as in their own castle, and might easily have resisted an invading force of ten times their number.

The old man was unique in many of his customs, but he was beloved and even revered by his entire family connection. The fact that he slept each night inside a great sack of coarse cloth, with the opening closely drawn up over his head by a string, as a protection against fleas, did not seem a matter for ridicule with the members of his household, as they nightly assisted the old gentleman's stiffening limbs into the bag. His wish was law throughout the whole ranch, and even now he was equal to the task of whipping the unwary lad caught in mischief and whose punishment was beyond the province of the schoolmaster; and woe to the boy whose parents handed him over to the lash in the patriarch's hand, for a brand of disgrace was left on his character which nothing short of leaving the ranch could remove.

The first serious division in the unanimity of the moral and religious life of this community of two or three hundred persons, was brought about when Mr. Richards, a Baptist missionary, had made his first journey through that region, five years before. All rose in indignation against the intrusion of the hated Protestant doctrine which

The Gateway to Vera Court.

his visit entailed, that is, all save Don Eduardo. He allowed no discussions in his own house, which might have led to unpleasant consequences, and which would have reflected upon his own character as host; but he gave the stranger an opportunity to speak in a vacant room outside of his gates, and himself attended the short services. One or two of the laboring men lounged about the door and several children were induced to enter at the sight of the bright picture cards which Mr. Richards had ready for them. Nothing seemed to be accomplished by this visit, and little by a second and third, while in reality the great good nature, the natural tact, and genuine earnestness of the man were making him many friends. When, on a fourth visit, he gave an opportunity to those who understood what he had been trying to teach them for many weeks and who having believed on the Lord whom he preached wished to unite in forming a Baptist church, to then and there declare themselves, Don Eduardo had offered himself as candidate, and had been followed by one of his sons, three serving men and the wives of two of the latter. These were baptized and formed into a church, and thereafter an interest was kept up among the people by the occasional visits of Mr. Richards, while a native preacher, Señor Jimenez, was appointed to preach at the ranch every Sunday. Sometimes his labors were supplemented by some

student from S——, where a Baptist school for young men had been established.

When Miss Summers came to the ranch the church numbered thirty men and fourteen women, but there was no Sunday-school at all. The sentiment of the ranch, however, was changed and though much fanaticism still survived, a kind of admiring indulgence was granted the young lady, who had left her home to come and live among her "sisters," as she called them, to teach them and help them in every possible way. It is true that the yearly visit of the priest had not been made since her arrival, and many a woman and girl knew already what the most important point in their annual confession must be. Still, so many had spoken with the Protestant lady, some having received her into their homes, that the danger of the confession seemed lessened for each, as all would fall under the same condemnation! And many weeks were wanting before Padre Esteban would reach San Bernabé, and meanwhile, the little chapel which was to be ready for him this year when he came, was still unfinished, and if the rains should come before the roof was on, the *adobe* walls would be worse than useless. Neither Raquel nor Petra had followed Don Eduardo's example, but Miss Summers was sure that Petra was a Christian, and hoped that she would ask for baptism when Mr. Richards should next come to the ranch. Raquel was thoughtful and silent, and

Mary had noticed that for the past two months she had not trudged over to Bienvenida to Sunday mass as had always been her custom before. José was a mystery. When in Mary's presence, he seemed like a shy schoolboy, not daring to lift his great wistful eyes to her face; at other times he was all energy and manliness, and every one predicted that he would be his father's successor in the personal management of the estate, as he was already his associate. Unlike his father, he was broad-shouldered and tall, his head was well-shaped, his hair black and waving, and his mouth and chin were particularly fine. Instead of the traditional black eyes, his were blue, and his skin was several shades lighter than that of his half-brothers and sisters, showing traces of the Spanish blood inherited from his mother's family. He was a silent and reserved young fellow, and though seldom wanting in the merry reunions of the family, he and his dog usually sat gravely at one side, taking little share in the general chatter. Discovering his passion for music, Miss Summers had offered to teach him the use of the little church organ, and he had already conceived a private plan for setting up a great pipe organ in his own room, or perhaps in the new Catholic chapel when it should be completed, and he would be the organist, and all the ranches, far and near, would flock to hear him and would be proud of him. To the music lessons was added English, and three evenings in

the week Mary spent in the prim, chilly *sala* of the house, seated opposite José at the center table, giving the lesson in English, while Raquel and Petra nodded over their knitting, and Eduardo played outside the door with his youngest son.

At first, the young teacher found her cares increased with the addition of Refugio to the household. For several weeks the girl was barely able to drag her feeble body from the kitchen to a sunny spot inside Mary's door, where she lay or crouched all day during school hours. Gradually, sufficient strength came to enable her to follow the scholars to the schoolroom, and she would rest all day on an old quilt near the teacher's feet. With surprising quickness she learned hymns and Scripture by heart, and at the end of six weeks she was able to take her place on one of the benches and enter the most advanced class. She was now a different creature, indeed, from the dying girl who had fainted at Mary's door a few weeks before; the cough had vanished, and she was fast growing plump and very pretty. Her short hair curled under her *rebozo*, her eyes had brightened, and she had the trim, neat little figure of a well-fed girl of sixteen. Her affection for her protectress was a kind of unconscious adoration, and Mary felt sure that in José and in Refugio she had two faithful friends who would at any time lay down their lives for her, if necessary.

On one of the last days of November, some weeks after Refugio's arrival, Mary had brought her chair out into the court to enjoy the afternoon sunshine after a rather chilly morning in the schoolroom. It was Saturday, and a half holiday, and having sent Refugio on an errand to the far-away end of the ranch, she was all alone. Petra hummed a song in the kitchen, across the court, and the tumbling baby had gone with his mother to visit a relative beyond the gates. The mail that day had brought letters and newspapers to the young missionary, and she was eagerly devouring home news, delightfully interesting if somewhat stale, when she heard steps behind her, and looking up, she encountered José's blue eyes, fixed somewhat ruefully on the pile of letters.

"You are busy?" he questioned, hesitatingly. "I did not notice. Refugio, whom I met a moment ago, told me that you were unoccupied, and I thought you might help me with this scale," drawing a roll of ruled music paper from his pocket as he spoke.

Not indulging in the sigh that rose to her lips, his friend took the sheet and easily found the errors which had puzzled the young man. He had taken his seat upon a large flat stone near her, and when she had explained the method of following out the scale, she expected him to leave. Instead, fingering the roll of music uneasily, he asked her very abruptly, and with flushed cheeks:

"Señorita María, why did you come here? I often hear the question asked. Some of the men were talking of it last night, and when they ask *me*, if they ever dare to do so, I should like to know what to tell them; that is, what you would like to have me tell them."

"I am glad, José, that you have asked me this," Miss Summers replied. "And I think that I can make *you* understand it. Life is a very serious thing, José, for those who think about it; and how little we all seem to appreciate it! Some say that there is no rule or law for our lives, that we do not know whence we came nor whither we are going, and that the only thing for us is just to do the best we can for ourselves without troubling about anything above and beyond us."

"And is that not true, señorita?" asked, José, gently. "Do we *know* anything better than that?"

"I do, José," looking at him with her bright look, that somehow gave him a queer catch in his throat this afternoon. "Let me tell you a rule I learned years ago which helps me; and really, I do not know how we can know what is the best we can do without following the spirit of this rule. Listen: '*Life is to do the will of God.*'" She stopped a moment, and looked away from the earnest face of the young man and out toward the mountain peaks which shadowed the ranch.

"What does that mean, señorita?" inquired

José, after waiting a moment for her to continue.

"We must first know what the will of God is, José, before we can be ready to do it. Now, there are several helps that he has given us for learning what is his will. The Bible, which you do not read, is a most important guide to this knowledge. If you would study it you would find amazing truths there, besides a fuller knowledge of his will. Then, there is besides, the law written in our hearts, which we cannot tell how, is always trying to lead us onward and upward—'a spark of the eternal God,'" she murmured. "I beg your pardon, José," she resumed; "this is really what I mean, that the duty of us all is to search for opportunities of improving ourselves and of improving our neighbors as ourselves, physically, mentally, and spiritually. It is a *duty*, not a whim which we may follow or not as we please. God has laid this duty upon us, and if we are in any perplexity as to the best way to perform it, we have only to ask him to make the way plain and he will do so. Now, I could not rest at home with every joy and comfort around me, feeling that there were powers in myself of teaching and helping others unexercised, and knowing that there were those needing the help that I could give. Then I thought, 'Life is to do the will of God,' and I knew that I wanted to *live*, and that this desire in me to teach others to live must come

from him to show me what I should do. Then I began to think of Mexico and of the girls here, who could know nothing of 'life' unless some one should tell them, and I could not forget the Mexican girls, and so I am here. And now do you think from what I have told you that you can find an answer for those who ask you why I have come?"

"Señorita," he replied, "I understand as I have never done before. Ah!" he continued, as if to himself, and there was no shyness left now, "it is like the Christ. They say that he left his Father's throne and came to teach men how to live, though I had never thought of it in that way before. And will you ever return, señorita, to that beautiful home and to those who must love you more than——". he did not finish, but waited for her reply.

"When my work is done I shall leave it, José. But who can say how or when that will be? My hope is to spend my life in Mexico, perhaps not always in San Bernabé, where others will be able to carry on what we have begun here; but who knows? I can only do what seems my duty today."

Refugio returned now from her errand, and José rose to his feet with a new light in his eyes as he held out his hand to Mary.

"Thank you, señorita," he said; "I shall not forget what you have told me."

CHAPTER V.

SUNDAY AT THE RANCH.

By desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't know what it is, and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil, widening the skirts of light, and making the struggle with darkness narrower.—*George Eliot.*

THE next day was Sunday, which at the ranch was kept in usual Mexican fashion. There was no Roman Catholic church nearer than La Bienvenida, a league and a half away, but most of the women and a few of the men always attended nine o'clock mass in the little gaudy chapel in that village. The day was observed as a holiday by those who did not wish to work, and the crashing flails were silent in the open space before the great barn. The mothers went about their usual tasks in the morning and spent the afternoon as they wished. Most of the men and boys wore clean, white cotton shirts and trousers. The women and girls wore their holiday attire of pink calico skirt, very full and stiffly starched, and perhaps a pink calico sacque with the inevitable *rebozo*.[1] The ranch was noisier on Sundays than on other days, for there was much clatter

[1] Long scarf-like shawl worn over head and shoulders.

along the road upon which the house doors opened, and here and there a gay song was sung, accompanied by a guitar. Boys and girls, released from the schoolroom, rolled in the dust of the road, adding their clamor to the other sounds of merriment.

On this morning Don Eduardo sat outside of his gateway, surrounded by his gray-haired sons and stalwart grandsons, and a few of the wives and children belonging to the Vera clan. The old man looked more patriarchal than ever, with such a gathering of generations about him, for many representatives of the family had come from small ranches in the neighborhood to spend this day with the oldest representative of the clan. Miss Summers had learned during the past week of the expected arrival of Daniel, the grandson of Eduardo, and son of Daniel, who was now an officer in the Mexican army, stationed in the capital city. It was probable that this notable *capitan* would arrive on this day, as news had been brought of his having been in S—— only two days before. As she remembered this, she better understood the general air of unusual festivity pervading the family party, as she left her room and approached the gate on her way to the mission house.

The first bell had already rung for morning service when she crossed the court and looked for Refugio, who was usually stationed just within

A Street Scene in the Ranch.

the arch awaiting her mistress. She was there now, and the pair went quickly forth, not pausing as a reiterated "*Buenos dias, señorita,*" sounded from every mouth. With a smiling return of the morning greeting they soon passed out of sight around the corner of the court. How she longed to take them all with her to the service, to leave not one to smoke his pipe or tell his tale in the shadow of the mulberry tree! Sunday after Sunday she had urged the attendance of one or all of the family, but Petra was the only one who had responded with anything like cordiality to her invitation. Don Eduardo often attended the service, but to-day his head was sick and heavy, and he hardly noticed the teacher's departure. José never failed to present himself at the first chord struck on the chapel organ, and just as regularly marched away as Señor Jimenez opened the Bible to read.

This morning, however,—and when she saw it Mary chided herself for her own lack of faith which had not allowed her to urge her usual plea to-day,—as the organ gave the keynote of the second hymn, most of the group which she had left gossiping about the gate entered the mission house door with a good deal of flurry, and some conscious giggling from the younger members of the party.

Some of them out of curiosity, and the others out of real admiration for the beautiful young

gringa, had decided to leave the old man and a dozen or more dogs to watch the road leading from the city, and they had, most of them, for the first time entered the "condemned foreigners'" chapel.

"Why not?" Angela had asked, a pretty young woman, who according to the gossips was in love with José Vera, and was his double first cousin. "I like music, and I love the pretty *Mariquita*. If I do not like the sermon, I can come away, as they say José here always does!" with a saucy toss of her head at the young man, who stood leaning against the tree behind her, already listening for the sound of the music.

"Let us all go," suggested Daniel, *padre*. "If Daniel comes, the dogs will let us know in time for us all to be here to receive him. But mind," he added to the laughing Angela, "and behave yourself, out of respect to the señorita."

"*Adios, padrecito*,"[1] cried Angela, in Don Eduardo's ear. "We are going to the señorita's mass, and to confess to the *padre protestante* afterward. *Ay de mí*, and what a penance in truth I shall have to make when our own padre hears!"

The old man looked wonderingly and wistfully after them, as all but Daniel's wife rose from their seats and sauntered along in the direction of the chapel. Doña Rosa sat upright upon a stool near her father-in-law's side. Raquel and Petra were busy in the kitchen.

[1] Farewell, little father.

"Whither have they gone, little daughter?" he asked, as the last one disappeared around the corner. "Is he come already? Dost thou hear the diligence?"

"No, *padre mio*," replied Rosa. "They are all fools and faithless. The little one, Angelita, has persuaded them to go to the señorita's *culto*,[1] and only I have stayed to bear thee company."

"It is well," returned the old man. "I am glad. To-day,—what day is this?—Sunday? Come, we will go also, why do we stay away?"

"No, no, father," exclaimed the woman, "we shall stay here and watch for the diligence. What a shame it would be for Daniel to arrive, our brave soldier, my son Daniel, and find no one to receive him but the dogs and the children out in the road. See, the shadows are even now pointing toward the north, and it is almost noon. Surely, it will not be long now," she added, with a mother's yearning in her voice.

Don Eduardo yielded, and after a little he threw his large red handkerchief over his head and face, and dozed, as the aged do, even on the eve of the most thrilling events. Doña Rosa kept her eyes fixed upon the long prairie road stretching away toward the mountains. Her holiday costume was a black silk skirt and tightly fitting white sacque, while over her ample shoulders was thrown the black shawl of the well-to-do middle

[1] Worship or church service.

class. Her black hair was smooth and shining, and hung in two long braids below her waist. Her black eyes were eager and burning, and in watching for the first sign of the approach of her son, they had lost the scornful expression which had accompanied the first words of her speech to her father-in-law.

Meanwhile, the feminine portion of the visiting party in the little church had found seats on the benches dedicated to the use of women and girls, while Daniel and one or two other men sat opposite, among the other male attendants.

The devout attitude of the little congregation, which gave not one surprised glance, nor uttered a whisper as the strangers entered, told upon even Angela's high spirits, and she accepted a hymn book handed to her by Carlos, whose serious manner did full justice to his important office of book-bearer. Juan Vera was standing close at Mary's elbow, and the rest of the nineteen children from the day school were present. The song selected was a great favorite.

As usual, when Mary began to sing, everything within and without grew quiet, and the strangers in the church fixed their eyes and ears upon the bright-faced organist. José sat in his usual place upon the door-step, the great white head of his dog upon his knee, but he looked away toward the mountains bounding the plain.

Mary's dress was white, and her large white hat

was pushed back from her forehead, where bits of sunny curls twisted and waved and framed the fair temples in a most bewitching manner. Her dark eyes grew very soft and reverent, as they always did when she listened to her little ones singing the tender words of the hymns, and to-day as Juanito's childish voice rang out above the others the tears started, and she could have taken him into her arms and hugged him.

They sang the last verse with the earnest emphasis which Mary had taught them to use with these words, and José started at finding himself hearing something in what was sung besides the music of Mary's voice:

> He *longs* to receive thee,
> He *wishes* to favor thee;
> To open to thee the doors
> Of eternal happiness.

"Come to Christ; come now," he repeated inwardly, forgetting to slip away as Señor Jimenez offered a short and simple prayer.

"How can I go to him? Where is he? The Virgin Mary I know, and she, they say, wrings pardon for us from her Son. How should I, a sinner, find him, the Son of God, who is perfect, and likes not sin nor sinners?"

The preacher arose from his knees, and speaking quickly and tenderly, told the ever-wonderful story of the cross to the little band of hearers.

"Just as I am, without one plea," was the

hymn selected, and the sweet, old familiar tune, Woodworth, which belongs to the touching words as none other does, thrilled through the little room and out upon the warm, still air of that perfect November Sunday. José listened, and a lump rose in his throat which he had never felt there before.

The discourse was short and impressive, Miss Summers thought, as she listened to the little man who usually seemed dull even to her. Perhaps he was encouraged and inspired by the increase of hearers to-day ; at any rate they all listened to the end, much to her surprise, and after another hymn, followed by the benediction, the strangers dispersed as quietly as any regular church-goers could have done. Angela lingered to speak to Mary, who was closing the organ and giving parting reminders to the children of the Sunday-school in the afternoon.

"Well, Angela," said Mary, as she found the young girl at her elbow, "I am glad you came and I hope you will come often. Why not? I am sure that José would go for you on Saturdays sometimes, and——"

"And my mother would shut me up in a convent, rather!" returned the girl, laughing. "Oh, do let me touch the little organ, just with one of my fingers! How is it that you can make such music? Did you have to learn, or was it born with you in the tips of your little white fingers.

Oh," she continued, not giving Mary time to answer her, "I know that you are teaching José, but his great, black hands, what can they do? I do not believe a word of his playing. Now, I," she murmured, looking only half approvingly at her own shapely little hand, so brown beside Mary's much larger one, "perhaps I could learn."

"Of course you can," replied Mary, eagerly. "And if you like I will teach you. How would you like that, Angela?"

"How beautiful that would be!" exclaimed the girl enthusiastically. "And then I should be equal with José," she added, her black eyes snapping, for she was not at all sure of the young fellow's attachment to herself, as he had grown strangely cold and thoughtful of late, in fact quite another José, she thought. "Bah! he will never learn," she declared.

"Oh yes, he will," returned Mary; "he is already learning. But he is shy, and always shuts himself up alone to play except when I give him his lesson."

"And then you two are together, is it not so?" asked Angela, slowly, fingering the organ keys with one hand, and looking away from Mary.

"Why, of course," replied Mary, "and you should see your José then, Angela, for he forgets everything but the music when he plays or when I am playing, and he grows quite gentle and solemn, and——"

"I think no one can forget you, Señorita María, when you are playing, no matter what the music may be," interrupted the girl brusquely; and then to Mary's astonishment she suddenly stepped through the door and was gone.

Sunday afternoons, after the little Sunday-school was over, were always spent by Mary in her own inner room, as fresh and dainty as could be found in all the republic, and she enjoyed the hours of silence and peace which were necessary to her welfare. This afternoon the children and the parents had seemed unusually interested in the Sunday-school lesson, and Mary and Señor Jimenez had had a little talk afterward, in which each had felt that he could encourage the other. Then Señor Jimenez had ridden away to a neighboring ranch where he was to hold an evening service, and Mary strolled homeward in the clear, crisp afternoon air, with a great peace and happiness in her heart. If she could only win Angela, what might not follow?

She came to the window of her room which opened upon the road and which could be made into a door as well, and here to her surprise she found Refugio standing on the step.

"I opened this door, señorita," she said, in a half-whisper, "because the court is already full of relations, and there are so many men, and there is so much noise that I thought you would rather enter without passing by them."

"What a thoughtful Cuca!" said Mary, really grateful for the delicacy of the girl's act, yet not surprised, for she had long since ceased being surprised at the constant thoughtfulness shown her by the little *rancherita*.[1] "Indeed," she continued, "this is much better, and now I shall rest awhile. What would you like, Cuca? Something to read?"

"I shall sit outside here, señorita, if you do not mind, and no one shall disturb you, for I have locked the door on the court."

Mary entered the bedroom and for an hour all was quiet as she sat at her little table writing. The door, turned again into a window by closing the half-leaves below, gave a view of spreading plain and purple mountain, so lovely that neither writing nor reading progressed very far. The room was high pitched, as all Mexican houses of the better class are, and the beams overhead were brown with age, and perhaps not altogether free from cobwebs, as nothing shorter than a twenty-foot pole would have reached them. The walls were only whitewashed, but were as white as white could be, and a thick soft mat covered the earth-floor. A single iron bedstead was draped in white, with full net curtains, as protection against mosquitoes, and an old-fashioned chest of drawers on one side faced a daintily appointed dressing-table on the other. The latter was only a box under

[1] Little country girl or peasant.

neath, but its muslin drapery was purity itself, and surely no pier glass ever reflected a lovelier face than did that tiny, gilt-bound mirror swung between the curtains of the toilet table. Out of another smaller box, José and Mary had evolved a bookcase of wonderful design, and this also was curtained with light flowered mull. A wicker rocker, one or two other chairs, and the large, round table which held books and writing materials, completed the furniture of the room. Two or three brightly dyed goatskins gave spots of color here and there, and Mary herself, as she sat at the table writing, gave a very unconscious air of completeness to the whole. Her face was flushed, perhaps with the memories that the half-written letter before her recalled to her mind. The first page began, "My dearest grandmamma," and she was beginning a second sheet when a great clamor of horses' feet, and wheels, and barking dogs, and women's shrill voices, and men's deeper tones, arrested her pen just as Refugio's face appeared above the half-door, full of eager excitement.

"He has come, señorita," she cried. "The *capitan* has come!"

"How glad his mother and all the rest will be, Cuca," replied Mary.

"Such a brave, noble fellow, Doña Rosa says he is," continued the girl, with enthusiasm. "Hark, is not that his sword clanking on the

pavement of the court? What a grand thing it must be to be the mother of a *capitan*."

Mary was not so sure of this as was Refugio, and she said nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of the girl, but only smiled to herself as she proceeded with her letter, more rapidly now, as the same diligence which had brought Captain Daniel, would carry the infinitesimal mail of San Bernabé to S——, the next morning.

Meantime, the court, the kitchen, and the *sala*[1] were scenes of mirth and rejoicing over the arrival. Outside the gateway were huddled the children of the ranch who did not belong to the Vera family, and many half-grown girls and women loitered in sight of the cheer and happiness within.

The young officer, object of so much bustle and attention, sat at Eduardo's left hand, whose right was occupied by old Raquel, and his bronzed face, bright eyes, and dashing mustache were perfection in his mother's eyes. That admiring dame sat at Daniel's feet on a low stool, and from time to time, stroked gently the dark blue cloth of her boy's sleeve, ineffable pride showing on her smiling face.

Never before had such a brave sight gladdened the eyes of San Bernabé as this gay officer presented, sitting with cap pushed back from his forehead, and one hand laid on the hilt of his sword. The gold of his epaulets, the red stripes of his uniform,

[1] Parlor.

the spotless linen cuffs and collar, and the shining, patent-leather tipped shoes made a picture which caused the heart of San Bernabé to bound with admiration and delight. It is true that bands of soldiers had tramped through the ranch from time to time, detachments sent over the mountains for the detention of brigands, and sometimes they had been received into that very court and treated according to Mexico's universal laws of hospitality, but they had been usually too travel-worn and weary to do more than eat, drink, and then roll over upon their mats for sleep. But this bright star was San Bernabé's own, and was to remain in the ranch for two weeks, so that each one might hope to be able at least to see him.

"So, Angela," the young captain was saying, "thou and José are making up to one another. Thou seest that I know something of what passes in the bosom of my family, though so far away. And by the way, where is José?" he questioned, looking carelessly over the group of youths lounging at a respectful distance. "I have not seen him, have I? It is so hard to know each one when one's family connection is so large," he ended, with an affected drawl.

"No, indeed, Cousin Daniel," replied Angela, who was all sparkles now and ready to take up the the cudgels at what she fancied some slight upon the absent José, "thou hast not yet seen José, or thou wouldst not need to ask. He is the finest

cousin I have, if he does not wear tight trousers, and pinch his toes, and play with a sword all day. There," she ended defiantly, and springing up, she rushed across the court, and almost without knowing what she did, tapped at Mary's door.

"Let me come in, please," she cried, as Mary opened the door; "I am frightened, and I am glad also, for I have given that stuck-up little *capitan* a piece of my mind. How Aunt Rosa will hate me! But he should not have taken upon himself so many airs!"

"Why, where has she gone, the little fiend?" asked the young man, as he saw the door close upon her. "Holy Virgin! but she is a beauty! Has she gone to find José?" with a sneer.

"That is the señorita *Americana's* room," replied Petra. "And surely I must be bewitched to be sitting here gaping when the *pobrecita*[1] must be starving!" and the good Petra hastened off to the kitchen, whence she emerged not many minutes later, carrying a small tray containing a cup of foaming chocolate and a white bun.

"'The señorita *Americana!*'" exclaimed Captain Daniel. "And who is she? Why is she here?" with great animation.

"The little Protestant," sneered Doña Rosa. "Thou needst not trouble thy brains about her; she will never do thee any harm, the little white-haired fool!"

[1] Poor little one, an expression of affection, as well as of pity.

"Who is she, papa?" repeated Daniel, looking at his father. "What is her name?"

"The Señorita María Veranos," replied the father, curtly.

"Veranos?" said Daniel, Jr. "Who ever heard of such a name? And yet thou saidst that she is *Americana!*"

"Veranos is her name turned into our language, Daniel," interrupted Raquel. "Bless her pretty face and her sweet voice!"

"Veranos, Veranos!" exclaimed Don Eduardo, catching at the name. "That is our señorita's name. Where is she? Has no one invited her to *merienda* with us? What can you all be thinking of?"

"Petra has carried her chocolate, father," said Raquel to her husband. "Thou knowest that on Sunday she stays alone in her room."

The entrance of José now created a diversion, and the young men met in a warm embrace. Then Daniel, still clasping José by the shoulders, held him at arm's length, and exclaimed:

"Well, in truth, thou *art* a fine fellow, José, as thy Angela says. Thou art a giant beside me," looking with ill-concealed pride, however, down his own trim, small figure, and up again into José's fine face. "How old are you, man?"

"As old as thyself, less three months, Daniel," replied José, "which makes me twenty-four, if I mistake not."

"Thou twenty-four already!" rejoined his nephew, whose bad, bright eyes fell before the manly gaze of José. "Ah," laughing slightly, as he turned away toward the table that was being laid in the court, "thou shouldst come to Mexico City, where three months would add three years to thy age!"

As they gathered about the table, some standing, others lounging on rough benches, Angela reappeared and took her place demurely in Daniel's seat at her grandfather's left hand.

"Ah, little one," exclaimed Daniel, perceiving the small, plump figure in his chair, as he turned away from José, "thy wings are swift as thy tongue. Where dost thou keep them folded away out of sight, so that we mortals cannot see them? And whither didst thou fly, little angel?"

Angela made him no answer save a toss of the head. Wound gracefully over her shoulders she wore a thin, gauzy *rebozo* of silk, of a beautiful rose color, and her dress was of white lawn dotted with pink, and her tiny feet were shod with the high-heeled, high-arched kid shoes, dear to the heart of the Mexican maiden. Her coal-black hair was drawn in a shining mass to the top of her head, while about her neck and ears waved tiny love-locks that softened the half-bold beauty of the rosy face.

She glanced at José, and finding his eyes fixed upon her in unusual admiration, she leaned toward

him and said with a half-shy and half-defiant expression in her eyes:

"I have been talking with Mariquita, José, and she has promised to teach me music too, if mamma will consent to let me stay here at the ranch with Uncle Eduardo. What thinkest thou of that, my Pepe?[1] Now we shall be rivals, and I wonder which will love the señorita best, thou or I."

"I think, Angela, that that will not be the question for us," replied José, growing a little pale, Angela thought, as she watched him searchingly, though his voice was firm and sweet. "I am glad thou art going to study music also and I know that thou wilt succeed. I often think when my big fingers stumble over the keys how much better thy small hands would do the work," and he took one of the little hands, stretched upon the table in the position for playing, caressingly into his own.

And Angela was satisfied, and drank her chocolate and ate her *tamales*,[2] taking no further notice of the little captain.

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[1] A pet name for José or Joseph.

[2] *Tamales* are rolled *tortillas* stuffed with seasoned meat chopped fine and cooked in corn-shucks.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD JUANA'S PROPHECY.

So others shall
Take patience, labor to their heart and hand,
From thy hand and thy heart, and thy brave cheer,
And God's grace fructify through thee to all;
The least flower, with a brimming cup may stand
And share its dew-drop with another near.—*Mrs. Browning.*

THE feasting continued for several days and was to end on Thursday with a grand picnic in the pine woods which clothed the nearest of the foot-hills, a distance of a league from the ranch. As Thursday was a half-holiday, Mary promised the entire day to her eager scholars, and on Wednesday evening was sitting reading in her room, enjoying in prospect the long, free day before her when she would be left alone in the house while most of the ranch would be absent at the picnic. It had been taken for granted that she would accompany the Veras, and out in the court a final council was being held for assigning places in the wagons and ox-carts for the women and children. When Miss Summers' name was mentioned, Refugio said in a soft voice to Petra:

"But the señorita is not going, Doña Petra;

she told me this morning that she would write letters all day to-morrow."

"Dost thou hear this, José!" cried Petra; "Refugio says that Mariquita will stay at home?"

"Who?" interruped Captain Daniel. "Is not the Señorita María going! Then I say we shall put off the picnic until a day when she can go."

José said nothing, but looked disappointed.

"I shall go and see," exclaimed Angela, jumping up from her seat, and starting toward Mary's apartment.

"And I with thee!" laughed the captain, hastening after her.

Miss Summers had already met Daniel several times in the court and outside in the village, and the bold admiration in his glance had amused while it annoyed her.

She now, however, politely invited him with his companion to enter her little ante-room and to sit down.

Angela begged that she would accompany them the next day, and the captain added his plea.

"Surely you are both very kind," replied Mary, "but I hardly know how I can spare the day. Besides, I have promised to go to El Porvenir to see Juan Gutierrez' little girl, who is sick and has not been able to come to school for several days. No," she added, decidedly, "I must not go to-morrow."

"But in the afternoon, señorita, after you have

done your letters and El Porvenir, I shall come back here for you and you will let me drive you to the Pond, is it not so?" asked Daniel, eagerly.

"No, señor," she replied, "that will be impossible. I thank you, but I cannot go."

"Then the day will be spoiled," cried Angela, impetuously, as she arose to leave the room; "and I know how cross José will be, and we shall all be glad when it is over."

"Yes," added the captain, "the day will be spoiled. But, it will be only a day after all, and we must endure it."

Mary arose with them, repeating her regrets sincerely, surprised that the party had really been counting upon her presence.

"She will not go," exclaimed Angela, rejoining the company in the court; "and if she refused when Cousin Daniel pleaded with her, there is no further use of speaking of it." She ended with an adorable glance at the captain, who stood twisting his mustaches vexedly, and for a great wonder unconscious of Angela's coquetry. Since the first afternoon of Daniel's arrival, she had seemed to change her mind as to the captain's charms, and if José was at all in love with her, and noticed her charming airs when the captain was near, he must have writhed under pangs of jealousy insupportable.

"The señorita will do as she pleases," said José, quietly. "The picnic is in your honor, Daniel,

and all of your friends will be there. There can be no question of putting it off, because they are already invited, and it would not be possible to notify them in time."

When Mary was preparing for bed awhile later, a gentle tap at the door announced Petra, who had only looked in on her way to her own room to say: "I wish you would go, señorita, but we wish you to do just as you wish, and after all you would find it very tiresome I fear, as so many would be strangers to you. Do not mind what Angela says; it is only that she loves you, as we all do," she concluded, affectionately.

"Thank you, Petra, for coming to tell me this," she replied, "for I felt sorry to disappoint any one, but I have promised the little one to go to see her to-morrow, and she is very sick I fear. Good night, Petrita, and a pleasant day to-morrow."

"*Buenos noches, señorita; que pase una noche muy feliz!*"[1]

"Oh, Petra," called Mary, as she was closing the door, "they will leave me the pony, will they not?"

"Of course the pony will be left for you, Señorita," answered a deeper voice than Petra's, and José's tall figure stood in the bright moonlight before her. Petra had already entered her room and closed the door.

[1] "Good-night, miss; may you pass a happy night!"

"The pony is yours," he continued, "do you not know that?"

"Thank you, José," she replied. "I do need him very much for to-morrow, and I have not had a gallop for a long time."

"I am glad you are not going to-morrow, señorita," continued José, thoughtfully. "At first, I was sorry; now I see that it is best. It will not be just exactly like the little church *fiesta*[1] papa gave not long ago. It will be very gay, and there will be dancing, and you say you do not care to dance."

"No, I do not know how to dance," she returned, smiling. "I hope you will enjoy the day very much, José; good night." And Mary disappeared.

"A word with thee, José *mio*," said a voice at José's elbow, as he was about to enter his door farther on. "The moon is fine, let us walk a little way before going to bed."

"With all my heart, Daniel," replied his young uncle, wondering what he could have to say to him.

"A fine night," remarked the young officer, as they walked on past the gate, and out upon the white road. "The rains are late this year. *Caramba!*[2] but I should not like to live here during the winter, with the roofs leaking, the court-yard

[1] Feast or holiday.

[2] An interjection, expressing surprise or dismay.

a lake, and every dog, cat, woman, and child huddling over the *brazero*[1] to keep warm! What do the fellows do here all winter long? What do you do, José?"

"I? Oh, I find a dry spot near the *brazero* also, and 'huddle' there, dodging the leaks till the rain stops and the sun shines again," replied José, gravely. "And then you know it does not rain *every* day. Sometimes it does not rain for several weeks, and the air is clear and cold and we go hunting, do we not, old boy?" patting the head of his dog, that was walking close at his side. "And then at night when it rains I read, and this winter I shall have the music and—and other studies. Oh, I do very well during the winter."

Captain Daniel wondered at the slight smile curving the grave lips of his companion, and caught at the word music.

"So you play, do you? On what instrument, the violin or the guitar?"

"On the organ in the chapel," replied José.

"Oh, I see! On the organ of the little Protestant, as mamma calls her. By the way, José, with which art thou in love, with the señorita *Americana* or with our Angela?"

José hesitated a few seconds, then replied:

"If I answer thee, Daniel, what will you do then?"

[1] Brazier.

"Make love to the other, of course," replied Daniel, laughing harshly, "that is, if the fancy does not strike me to cross *thee*. Come, confess."

José was again silent for a moment, then pointing to a tiny spark of light glimmering in a neighboring ranch, he replied slowly and impressively:

"Do you see that point of light, Danielito, far away at El Porvenir?"

"Of course, Pepe *mio*," replied Daniel, both having fallen unconsciously into using the diminutives of their childish days.

"And the moon overhead?" and both looked up into the heavens, where the full moon was shining in unclouded splendor.

"Yes," again assented Daniel, looking a second time curiously into his companion's open, intelligent countenance.

"*Bien, amigo mio*[1]. Understand, then, that as that little light over there is to the brilliancy of the moon in the sky above us, so am I, so art thou, to the Señorita María."

"And you do not love her?" persisted Daniel, a little cruelly perhaps.

"Yes, I love her," replied José, slowly. "And she knows as much of it as the moon does, for I am as near to her as I am to the moon."

"And Angelita?"

"Love her, if thou wilt, but be a man and do

[1] Well, my friend.

not treat her as a child. She is a woman now."

"Yes, and loves you."

"Enough of this nonsense!" exclaimed José, carelessly. "Is this the talk you brought me out to hear?"

Yet José that night did not sleep so soon as Captain Daniel, and it is even doubtful whether he closed his eyes at all before the early rising the next morning for the start to the picnic grounds.

Miss Summers was aroused by the clamor before the light of the rather chilly morning had fully dawned. Don Eduardo's premises were to be the starting point, and by half-past five o'clock preparations had begun.

She was lying half dreaming an hour later, when Refugio gently tapped at her window to bid her young mistress farewell, if she should be awake. She went to the window and gave her young charge some parting directions. She had already given her into Petra's special care, and the latter had promised to keep her with her all day.

Refugio's eyes were sparkling with joyous anticipation of the delight of riding to the mountain in an ox-cart beside Petra. She looked exceedingly pretty in her pink gingham dress, with her dark blue *rebozo* thrown picturesquely over her head and shoulders. José had not

mounted his horse yet, and stood in the road opposite Mary's window, assisting in getting the procession of motley vehicles and steeds under way. He was very handsome in his holiday suit, which set off his fine figure to perfection. A clatter of hoofs and a general scurry of dogs and pedestrians announced the approach of a reckless horseman, and all watched the little captain as he rounded the corner from the stables and galloped up to José. He was mounted on a great black horse, and sat stiff and upright in the ponderous Spanish saddle of beautifully embossed leather. Every part of his uniform was immaculate, from his cap to the pointed toe of his little boot, and besides his clattering sword, a pistol showed at his side. José was also armed, a pistol on each side gleaming below his waistcoat, and he saluted politely as this bright vision dashed up to his side.

"All are here now, of our party," said José; "it is time to start. You, Antonio, bring up my horse."

He mounted his horse, a fine gray of noble proportions, bearing a saddle resembling Daniel's, behind which a gayly colored blanket was strapped, The two friends headed the party, and their horses fretted with long waiting, and piqued by the crispness of the morning air, gave their riders as much as they could do to control them. Then followed the creaking ox-carts, each accompanied

by a youth on foot bearing a stout, six-foot pole having a sharply pointed goad of steel at one end ; quite a drove of little donkeys and ugly little broncos trotted and pranced before and behind, mounted by half-grown boys and girls, and the rear was closed in by a quaint old chaise drawn by two work-horses, and bearing the patriarch, his wife, and his Benjamin.

After all were gone, the village was very quiet and seemed to have sunk to sleep again. The day was cooler than any of the season so far, and heavy blue clouds stood ready to receive the sun when he should appear above the mountain.

Miss Summers spoke of the threatening look of the sky when, an hour later, the old woman who had been left in charge of the house, brought her some hot *tortillas* and a couple of fresh eggs for breakfast.

"It will not rain to-day," replied the old crone, shaking her head, "but before many days 'the waters' will begin. For many months we have had no clouds, not one in the sky, and I said as I saw them this morning, one more week to get the roofs in order, one more week to finish the threshing of the beans, and then they will come, the waters !"

Mary had chosen to make her own breakfast in Petra's absence, and already the water in the little brass tea-kettle was boiling and the table laid. After making tea in a gay little Japan teapot, she

poured the remainder of the boiling water over the eggs, and five minutes later sat down to her simple morning meal. Her thoughts were very busy, and the loneliness of the house did not impress her as it would certainly have done otherwise. First, there was a letter to be written to a children's missionary society at home. The leader had written several weeks before, asking for a letter which would interest the children and prove a tempting bait for gathering in several who had strayed from the meetings.

"Your letters always please them so," the leader had written. "Your name is an inspiration to them, and if they could only have a short greeting from you every month for each meeting, I am sure they would do wonders."

This, of course, was pleasant to hear, but as she had such letters by almost every mail, it was fast growing impossible to answer them all.

"If I could only copy one letter and send the same to a dozen societies, it would be so much easier," she reflected. "Copying paper is a simple thing to manage; but then, some society without thinking it necessary to consult me, would publish their letter in the missionary column of some newspaper, and then where would I be, and my copied letters?"

After the letter, she must prepare her quarterly report for the Mission Board, giving briefly some account of the work at San Bernabé since Au-

gust. And after dinner she must set out for El Porvenir.

While washing the breakfast dishes and arranging her rooms, she planned the main points of her missionary letter and, after that, the hours flew by until, to her great astonishment, the tousled gray head of the old woman was again thrust into the room, with the inquiry as to whether she was ready for dinner.

"Oh, dinner!" she exclaimed. "Why I have just finished breakfast, Juana *mia!*"

"With the sun saying that it is one o'clock, señorita? Thou must have been asleep. Thy dinner is ready."

And so was Mary, as she found, after signing her name to the last page which she had written. She stepped to the well for a drink of fresh water which the old woman had just drawn, and found the heat of the sun almost insupportable. What seemed the same dark clouds of the morning, only shifted around to the west, lay banked closely about the horizon, while the sun glared through the steely blue ether overhead.

"Will it rain, Juana?" she asked again.

"No," she replied, as before; "not to-day, nor to-morrow."

"But see those clouds in the west, and this still, hot air is unusual so late in the season, I am sure. I have seen nothing like it since I came to San Bernabé."

"Those clouds are full of wind, not water," muttered Juana, in reply; "and those who seek for pleasure would better seek it nearer home."

"There will be a storm then?"

"Yes, but not yet! not yet! Not until night, señorita, and do not be afraid, Mariquita; the Holy Virgin will preserve you. You are not to perish in a storm of wind. Oh, no. There will be people there, *then*, many, many people; and there will be blood, and little children will be killed, and mothers will weep, and fathers will curse and kill——"

Mary looked in amazement at the old creature, who was crouching now on the ground and drawing mystic figures in the sand at her feet.

"What are you saying, friend?" asked Mary, stooping, and laying her hand on the woman's shoulder. "That there will come a danger to us such as you describe?"

"Do I not say so? No, the storm *then* will not be of wind, and who will preserve you then? Not the most holy mother of God. No, no, no! In her name will they come."

Here she began muttering again, and Mary walked off to her room and dinner, not without an uncanny tinge to her thoughts.

This was quickly dispelled, however, in doing justice to the dinner set before her. After dinner, finding that the sun would be too hot for her visit to the neighboring ranch for some time yet, she

ordered one of the laborers at dinner in the court, to bring the pony to the door at half-past three, then setting her little alarm clock for that hour, she threw herself on the bed and for two hours enjoyed a sound, dreamless sleep, undisturbed by any harrowing visions.

About half-past four, Mary cantered up to the open doorway of a small *adobe* cottage in El Porvenir, standing a short distance back from the bridal path, which had branched off from the main road a mile or so back. She slipped easily from the saddle, and fastening a lasso, coiled on one side of the saddle, to a strong stake in front of the house, left her pony nibbling at the short, dry prairie grass and went toward the house. Everything was spotlessly neat and clean, from the sandy space about the door to the little hallway, and on into a large, bare reception room, called the *sala*. As she stood at the door, a pleasant-faced woman appeared from a back room and saluted her with delight and affection.

"Oh, little sister, how glad I am to see you! Lola has been asking for you all day long, and has sent her papa a dozen times to see if he could see you coming. One of us has to stay with her all the time, as she is not quite herself and tries to get up and run out to the well. She is burning up inside, she says," and the mother's voice grew very anxious.

A Ranch Cottage.

"Let us go at once and see her, *hermana*,"[1] Mary returned; and lifting a small leather bag from the step where she had placed it on her arrival, she followed the woman.

The Gutierrez family were members of the San Bernabé Church, and Mary had been particularly attracted by the woman's pleasant manner and the husband's intelligent face, even before the little girl, Lola, had won her heart at school. As they entered the back room, Mary's first glance saw that it was very small and dark, and the closeness of the air inside made her gasp for an instant. The only window was but a hole, which had evidently been dug through the wall since the building of the house, and the door opening into a kind of shed gave little additional light and air. A baby slept in the box cradle slung from the roof, and on a pallet in the darkest corner lay the sick child. The father sat beside her, straining his eyes over a small volume which he held in his hand, and which Mary recognized as the New Testament. A box and a rude bed of planks, laid across two supports like carpenter's "horses," and a chair, were all that the room contained.

"*Maestra*," cried Lola's little shrill voice, "you have come, my beautiful, and you will make me well as you did Aunt Catarina's Samuelito!"

Mary knelt by the side of the sick girl and found her hands burning with fever, while her

[1] Sister.

bright eyes seemed to gleam out of the darkness.

"She is very ill, señorita," said the father, sadly. "Is there anything you can do for her?"

"What have you done already? And how long has she been ill?" asked Miss Summers, with her finger upon the racing pulse in the small wrist.

"She was ailing the day before yesterday, but not till yesterday, when I sent you word by Samuel, has she been like this. We did not know what to do for her. Her *tia*[1] made her a cup of hot tea last night, but she vomited it immediately, and to-day she will take nothing, but cries all the while for water. Of course we have not given her any, and we have kept her in here so that the air would not strike her, as you see."

"Now, Lolita," said the teacher, turning pitifully to the child, who was half-unconscious again, "tell me, little one, what hurts thee."

"My head, oh, my head, *maestra*, and my arms and legs."

"Poor little one!" murmured Mary, caressingly; then she stood up suddenly and faced the parents.

"*Hermanos*," she said, "do you wish me to treat the child? And will you let me do with her as I think best?"

"Yes, yes," both answered together; "any-

[1] Aunt.

thing to save our Lola's life. Her brother Juan went off just this way last year."

Then Mary called the woman into the front room, which had two windows, and was clean and airy.

Most Mexican houses, even of the lower classes, have their large *sala*, which is their "drawing room," if they are able to afford such an apartment, or it may contain half a dozen beds, if the family is large.

Mary laid aside her hat and gloves, and going out to the horse, unfastened from the saddle a large bundle and brought it in with her.

"Now, *hermana*," she said, "while Don Juan and I arrange the bed in here, I want you to put on the fire the largest *hoya*[1] you have, full of water, and let me have a fresh gown or chemise for Lola."

Under her direction the man moved the poor bed into the front room, wondering greatly at the change from the close, dark hole within.

"No, not that way," interrupted Mary, as he was placing the bed. "Her eyes must be away from the light, though we must leave the windows all open for the air."

Then she took a pair of clean sheets from her bundle, and a little soft pillow which had already seen service in other cases of childish illness in San Bernabé.

[1] Earthen jar for water.

"Now bring her here, Don Juan," said Mary. "We must stop that suffering right away."

She made the man sit down, holding the limp little form in his arms, and after taking the child's temperature with her fever-thermometer, she selected a pair of sharp scissors from her bag and swiftly cut the long black hair from the fevered little head. Neither father nor mother said a word, though tears were streaming down the cheeks of the latter as she stood holding Lola's little clean nightdress in her hands.

"Water, water," moaned the child.

Mary held a cup of cold water to the hot lips, and let them drain it to the last drop.

"Now, bring me the warm water, Doña María; and Don Juan, you may lay her on the bed. We will do the rest now, and you can rest awhile, as you will have to watch her all night." And as he left the room, she slipped off the dress worn by the child, and when the water was brought, began bathing the poor little body from head to foot, and over and over again, swiftly and skillfully. Then, not to exhaust her too much, they put on the fresh nightdress, slipped another dry pad beneath her, and laying wet cloths of cool water on her head, left her in quiet for a few moments, with the sheet thrown lightly over her.

Doña María tidied up the room, and then went out to put more water on the fire. A cool breeze entered the room, and the child's breathing seemed

to grow easier, but on taking her temperature after an interval, Mary found that it registered the same high degree of fever.

She opened her bag again, and took out a box of small, white powders, and taking a cup of water in her hand, bade the mother lift Lola's head from the pillow. She was easily roused, and opened her mouth for the powder very willingly at the sight of the cup of water, which was to reward her.

"Now we will let her rest, Doña María," said Mary, smiling into the anxious face of the mother. "Keep changing the cloths on her head, while I speak to your husband outside. In fifteen minutes there should be a free perspiration, and if I find her temperature lowered, Lola must have a little milk. Have you any?"

"No, señorita; but Juan will go to his sister's, near by, and she will give it to him fresh from the cow. She loves Lolita like a little daughter."

All came to pass as Mary had hoped. At the end of twenty minutes the little aching body was moist, and Lola was sleeping quietly, with all the restless twitching and moaning gone, for the present.

Mary gave explicit directions as to the nourishment to be given when the little girl should waken, and left a powder to be given if the fever and restlessness should return during the night, and then she found that it was growing dusk, and that she

would have barely time to race from one ranch to the other before night.

"Send me word by Samuel to-morrow when he comes to school, and let me know how you passed the night," she said, as she shook hands with the grateful parents, who were smiling again now. "I shall come again to-morrow afternoon," she called, as she turned the pony's head in the direction of San Bernabé.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORM ON THE PRAIRIE.

The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.—Nahum 1 : 3.

THE pony was swift, and although the cloud which had hung about the horizon was rising now and spreading over the whole western sky, Mary thought that she would have time to reach San Bernabé before the storm could travel across the space between the cloud and herself. When she left Gutierrez' house, there was a strange hush over the prairie, and the air was as hot as the breath of a furnace; when she left the path and turned into the high road, she suddenly felt a strange difficulty in breathing, and soon, eyes, nose, and mouth were filled with sand, and the pony and rider were blown quite out of the road by the strong, swift gust of wind which had brought the sand. The little pony instinctively turned her back upon the wind and planted her feet wide apart upon the short, dry tufts of prairie grass and waited calmly until the first fury of the gust had passed. Mary's face tingled and smarted, and she and the pony coughed sympathetically from throats clogged with the pelting particles of sand.

Then, when the wind had subsided for a second, she started at full gallop along the three-mile road leading to the ranch. The cloud now seemed to cover the whole heavens, and it grew perfectly dark, while the wind blew in an ever-increasing gale, and the air was filled with the penetrating sand.

Mary urged on her little steed, encouraging her by shouting terms of endearment into her ear, while the storm roared about them ; but she was soon aware that they had left the road. She dropped the reins then upon the pony's neck, and lifting her face to the black sky in silent prayer, ceased trying to direct the pony, and occupied herself in peering with straining eyes in all directions for the lights of the village. She knew that the pony would keep as near the road as the strength of the gale would allow ; but the brave little beast could make small headway with the wind striking her full on the right side, and only pausing as if to recover fresh strength for the next broadside.

They had proceeded in this fashion for perhaps half an hour, and utter blackness of darkness still stretched before and behind, and Mary had lost all idea of the direction in which San Bernabé lay, when suddenly the pony pricked up her ears and gave a short, low whinny of delight. At the same time, Mary heard the sound of hoofs striking quickly and sharply against the loose rocks with

which the whole plain was strewn, and soon a voice hailed her from behind. She answered as loud as she was able, but her throat and lips were so dry that only a slight sound escaped them, and a plunging horse, coming up from behind, was passing them in the thick darkness and only a few feet away, when the pony neighed again.

"Holy Virgin!" cried the voice of Captain Daniel; "to think that we were side by side and that I was passing you in the dark! Why did you not call?"

"I did call as loud as I could," shouted Mary; "but the wind carried my voice away. Oh, where are we, captain, and how shall I ever reach home when I do not know whether the ranch is before or behind me?"

"You are riding away from it as hard as you can, señorita," replied Daniel, wheeling his horse around and feeling for the reins which lay on the pony's neck, and throwing them over his arm and shouting at the top of his voice as he answered her. "This little monkey knew that El Porvenir was nearer than San Bernabé, and so when the wind twisted her around she did not take the trouble to turn again, but was making for the first shelter she could find. Come now, and hold on with all your strength, for Black Jane is stronger than the wind, and will carry us all to shelter in a few moments. Do not be afraid, little one," he added, leaning over close to Mary's ear,

as she gave a startled cry when Black Jane darted forward again. "Do you think that I have come out to find you, all this way from home, to let aught harm you now, little friend of my heart?"

She was silent, and for more reasons than one, for it required all the strength of her strong, young hands clutching the pony's mane to keep her place on her back, as she galloped swiftly, close to the big horse at her side. There was perfect silence as they tore across the plain toward what Mary hoped was San Bernabé, although she could not see a foot beyond the pony's nose.

"Ah!" exclaimed Daniel, in a surprised tone, "where are we, indeed?" as after fifteen minutes his horse stopped so suddenly as to almost dislodge his rider from the saddle. "The chapel! Well, it is best. She could have stayed on but a moment longer. Mother of God! is she dead already?" But Mary opened her eyes, as she felt herself lifted from the panting pony and carried, she knew not whither.

"Rest there a moment, señorita," said Daniel, placing her on the ground in the darkness, and she suddenly felt a great calm around her, though the storm raged on beyond and above where she sat leaning against a rough wall.

"There," said Daniel, again close at her side, "I have put the horses on the sheltered side of the building, and they will wait for us there until the storm passes."

"But, where are we, Captain Daniel?" asked Mary, piteously. "It is so dark that I can see nothing."

"This is the chapel, señorita, which we are building in so much haste for the coming of Padre Esteban," Daniel replied, sarcastically. "And only the miraculous help of the Virgin Mary can get this place ready for his reverence when he comes on his annual rounds a few weeks from now."

Mary recollected the half-finished walls of the Catholic chapel, which stood on the outskirts of the ranch, adjoining the little walled-in burying ground, and realized that they were but a five minutes' ride from Don Eduardo's house.

"But why stop here, sir, when so near home?" she asked, rising to her feet, and groping her way toward the doorway which showed dimly now, though the storm gave no signs of abating.

"Black Jane brought us here, señorita. And you would have fallen from your horse at the next step. Do you know that you had already let go your hold, and your eyes were closed when I lifted you from the saddle? Stay, nothing shall harm you. See, I shall make a light." And he struck a match, and standing in a corner carefully lighted a wax taper which he carried in his pocket. This he stuck in a crevice in the rough wall, and then he and Mary turned and looked into each other's eyes. The flickering, feeble

light showed two figures in costume rather the worse for the struggle with the storm, and Mary laughed merrily when she saw the captain's dismay as he realized his appearance. The spotless dark blue of his uniform of the morning was changed into a dirty gray, while collar, cuffs, hands, and face were grimy with perspiration and the sticky sand. He made a movement toward the light as if to extinguish it, and thus destroy the annihilating effect of his dishevelled array, but his companion quickly intercepted him.

"See," she exclaimed, laughing, "I am in the same plight, and have lost my hat too. Oh, what a dreadful ride!" And she hastily began gathering up the heavy masses of her golden hair, from which she had lost every hairpin in that mad gallop. Daniel forgot himself and his dismal plight as he looked into the beautiful flushed face before him.

"But do you think we are quite safe here?" she continued. "I have heard it said that these walls are weak, and will not bear the winter rains and wind. There!" she continued, growing white, as a rattling fall of rocks and dirt sounded not far from them; "did you hear that? Let us go. The prairie is better than this."

"No, señorita," replied Daniel; "here we are safe. This is the tower, and it is of stone, while the other walls are of *adobe*. And listen! There is hail now. Soon the tempest will be over and

we can get to the house. What is it, señorita; are you frightened? No? Then you are cold. And it is growing cold, very cold, with this wind and hail. *Valgame dios*,[1] how this sand gets into one's teeth and throat!"

Mary stood in the doorway, which was on the sheltered side of the little tower room, and looked out upon the ground, which was growing white with the pelting hail. She shivered again, and longed for the shelter of her little room and the comforting presence of Refugio, or of the good Petra, or José. Then, for the first time she recollected the picnic party, and turning to Daniel, who stood at her side now, also looking out into the wild darkness beyond their refuge, she asked:

"But how is it, Captain Daniel, that you met me on the road, when it was yet too early for the party to return? I thought you were to come home late by moonlight,—and where can they be? Refugio *mia*, where can she be in all this storm, and the others?

"Do not distress yourself, señorita," her companion replied; "they are already at home, and it will be Refugio and Petra and 'the others' who are crazy about your whereabouts. Oh, it is easily seen that you are no *ranchera*,[2] or you would have known better than to go so far from home, with that kind of a cloud in the west. We saw it just after dinner was over, and lost no time

[1] God bless me! [2] Country woman or peasant.

in packing up and coming home, and we arrived just as the first gust struck us. José was busy getting the animals under shelter, and so he did not hear that you were away, and I told no one that I was coming after you, because—well, it does not matter why. Old Juana was muttering something about '*la Mariquita blanca*'[1] and the tempest, and was grinning like the old she-devil that she is, so I only asked her whither you were gone and hurried after you."

"And I do not know how to thank you, Captain Daniel, for you have perhaps saved my life. And what a miracle that you found me, in that pitchy darkness. You would never have heard my voice in all the noise, if the pony had not neighed."

"And now, instead of the music and dancing in my grandfather's *sala*, they are all sad and wondering what has become of us, of you and me, little dear one," added the captain, moving a little closer to her.

"Excuse me, *señor capitan*," returned Mary, drawing herself up to her full height, and looking down into the little soldier's face. "You have perhaps saved my life to-night, and I have thanked you, but I cannot permit you to speak thus to me. Understand me, if you please; and now, I am sure we can go on to the house. I am not afraid of getting wet, and it is only raining. Come, I am going," she added, decidedly, stepping out of the

[1] The little white Mary.

tower and looking up to the sky, which was still very black.

The wind and hail were over, however, and the captain followed the young woman to where the horses were neighing in an angle between the tower and an adjoining wall. He ground his teeth at this unexpected ending of such a romantic situation, and in sullen silence helped Mary to mount her pony.

A loud barking of dogs and a confused babel of tongues greeted them as they rode through the gates which had been left wide open since the return of the picnic party. Petra and Refugio were at Mary's side in a moment as she rode to her own door, and the trio, joined by Raquel and most of the other women, vanished within and Mary, at least, was seen no more that night.

José followed Daniel to his room, whither he hurried to change his dusty and damp clothing, and shut the door.

"Well?" said José, briefly, as Daniel began to disrobe.

"Well," replied Daniel, as briefly.

"Where didst thou find her?"

"Traveling away from San Bernabé as fast as she could in the dark."

"And thou broughtest her back?"

"And I brought her back."

After a pause, while Daniel sat half-dressed on the edge of his bed, José said:

"Thou art tired, old fellow. Come in to supper; they have kept it hot for thee."

"I want no supper, leave me here. I shall go to bed," dejectedly.

"But the dancing and—and our little cousin. She will be disappointed, I can tell thee; she has watched anxiously for thy coming. Come, I shall not leave thee here."

Thus adjured, Daniel easily persuaded himself that his presence was necessary to the enjoyment of the festivities of the evening, and he soon issued from his room freshly attired and with but the suspicion of a cloud resting upon his countenance. He noticed as he crossed the court that the sky was clearing also, and that the moon was shining through the rifts in the clouds.

It was José who remained in his room that evening, but as he seldom danced, few noted his absence from the *sala*. The "little cousin" indeed pouted as she flew around the room, but the captain was far from guessing the reason of that rosy pouting and easily forgot to ask it, while the merry black eyes sparkled and flashed upon him and the warm little hands trembled within his own.

CHAPTER VIII.

LITTLE LOLA'S QUESTION.

Wherever souls are being tried and ripened, in whatever common place and homely ways—there God is hewing out the pillars of his temple.—*Phillips Brooks.*

THE sun appeared the next morning in a bright, cloudless sky, and on the treeless prairie no trace was left of the storm of the night before. Men and women went about the ranch muffled in blankets and shawls, for it was bitter cold, and noses and ears were nipped by the biting air until they were blue and numb.

Mary waked with extra bed-covering tucked closely about her head and shoulders. At the first sound she made, Refugio entered, bringing fresh water from the well and a bright morning greeting upon her rosy face.

"Why, Refugio," exclaimed Mary, with her teeth chattering, "what does this mean? Has winter come at last? And who covered me so warmly with the blankets?"

"It was I, señorita," replied Refugio, showing her milk-white teeth in a brilliant smile. "You slept so soundly."

"Cuca is really beautiful," thought Mary,

watching the girl's radiant face as she prepared the bath.

"Yes," continued the girl, "winter is now here and it is very cold this morning, but so clear and beautiful. After a while the sun will warm the air, and by noon it will be almost warm again, but there will be no more hot days and nights now. This is the best time of the whole year, I think, for later the rains will come and then you may well say, 'It is cold,' *valgame Dios!*"

"Refugio," said Mary, gravely, "have you forgotten, and are you never going to learn that it is wrong to use that expression?"

"Señorita, pardon me," replied the girl, penitently. "It is so hard to stop saying what one always says without thinking."

"That is one reason why you should not say it, child. If you were really thinking of God and speaking to him it would be different. As you are not, it is sinful, for we are told not to take his name in vain."

"I shall try to remember better, indeed I shall, señorita. But surely you are not going to take your bath *cold* this morning. I put the kettle on the stove and the water is hot by now. Ugh!" she shivered as Mary plunged her fair, round arms into the fresh water.

"No warm water for me, thank you," declared Mary. "Now go, if you have had your breakfast, Cuca, and open the schoolroom doors wide, so

that we may have fresh air in plenty to-day. I feel as if I could fly," she continued to herself, as Refugio closed the door, "and as if a breath of the dear home winter had come to me. I can go to see Lola to-day at noon, without waiting for the afternoon, with who knows what kind of wild experiences, wind and black horses, and towers and captains, and all that kind of thing. Heigh-ho! I will play that was all a dream of last night."

"*Ay, Ay!*"[1] sighed Refugio to herself, after leaving her teacher alone, "if it is cold water that does it, that gives my Mariquita such soft, white skin, I would even like to try it myself. But I suppose it is too late now," she added, ruefully, rolling up her sleeve and passing her brown hand over her smooth, rounded arm.

She was nearing the schoolhouse door as she spoke half aloud, and was surprised to find it already open. José, seated at the organ, was turning over the leaves of a music book containing a number of simple chants and melodies. He nodded, smilingly, to Refugio as she entered, and began playing while she went softly about the room gathering up bits of paper and arranging books and seats for the little scholars who were to come later. José, in the midst of his laborious spelling out of the notes, looked up once and found Refugio standing at his side with puzzled eyes. He stopped playing and asked her of what she

[1] Exclamation of pain or grief.

was thinking, and then he, like Mary, noted with surprise the rich beauty of the girl of whom he had never taken especial notice before.

"Don José, perhaps you can tell me what is the difference between the *Americanos* and ourselves: that is, why is my señorita so sweet and fair to look at, and we—and I so ugly and brown? Is it, do you think, the soap and water that makes the difference? Of course I use them also," she added, hastily. "The señorita has taught me that to be healthy one must be clean; but she is like a duck for water!"

"Of course, child," replied José, "you must have sense enough to know that no washing can ever change the color of any one's skin. I do not know very much, myself, about the cause of the difference in the color of different nations, but I know that we get our dark skin partly from our Indian ancestors and partly from the hot sun of this climate. All nations living in the countries where the sun is hottest have dark-colored skins and dark hair and eyes, while those of colder climates have white skin, and blue eyes, and fair hair. I cannot tell you why, but all the soap and water in Mexico will not make you or me white."

"But you *are* almost fair, Don José," said Refugio. "Almost as fair as the *gringo*[1] who stopped in our village and told me about my sweet angel María."

[1] Foreigner.

"Go on with your work, child," replied José, closing the book and organ. "It is almost school time, and here come the children already. And mind, do not chatter so much about dark skin and white. Remember that you are a Mexican, and as God made you. Only keep your heart clean, and——"

"That is good advice, José," interrupted Miss Summers' voice at the open door, and a red flush dyed the young man's whole face and neck, as she entered, fresh and rosy from her brisk run to the schoolhouse. Her blue flannel dress and blue riding cap looked comfortable and suitable for such a wintry morning, and Refugio clasped her hands in delight at the sight of the long plait of hair which reached below her teacher's waist.

"That is all that we need to care much about in this world, isn't it, José, clean hands and pure hearts? And a fresh, clean morning like this makes one feel like beginning all over again to make one's life as pure and fair, does it not? Will you tell some one, please, to saddle Blanquilla and have her ready for me, here at the door, at twelve o'clock?" she continued, as José stepped past the little children who were gathering about the door.

"Certainly, señorita," he answered. "And I hope you are well after last night's wetting. It did you no harm?"

"Not the least," she replied, smiling; "but I

have learned a lesson that I shall not soon forget, —to beware of threatening black clouds in the west after this. Ah! here is Samuel. Come, child, and tell me the news of Lolita. What message did her father send me?"

Mary hung her cap on a nail and sitting, drew toward her a curly-haired boy of ten years, who was eagerly waiting to deliver his news.

"Lolita is better, señorita," he replied, "and my *tio*[1] Juan told me to say to you that she is cool this morning and that she slept well last night. She drank a little drop of milk too this morning, that I carried her in my china cup but, señorita, she could not speak to me, she was so weak, and her eyes did not look like Lola's eyes."

"I shall go with you, dear, at dinner time to see Lola, and you shall ride behind me on the pony. Come now, *queridos*,[2] it is school time. Ring the bell, Juan!"

Mary's heart swelled with thankfulness and love as her children gathered about her, and a prayer was in her heart all the morning:

"Father, give me these little ones to train for thee, until they are able to walk in thy way alone and able to teach others the way. Let them be a part of my offering to thee when my life is over, and let not one be lost!"

Three hours later sturdy little Blanquilla easily carried her double load along the road from which

[1] Uncle. [2] Dear ones.

she had been so unceremoniously turned the night before by the wind, and Samuel never forgot his gallop behind the *maestra*, on the pony's back.

Lola was better, but looked faint and hollow-eyed when Mary approached her bed. Her mother was coaxing her to take a spoonful of watery-looking broth when Mary arrived, and was glad to give up her post to the young teacher, as Lola refused to open her pale lips.

"What would you like, Lolita?" asked Mary, smoothing gently the shorn black locks of the little girl, "What can you take, little one?"

"Not the soup, señorita. I cannot bear it."

"And she will not take the milk either, señorita," complained the mother.

"It does not taste good, and I do not like it," wailed the little girl.

Mary thought a moment and then left the room. She took a bottle of "beef juice" from her bag, and a small package of crackers, and going into the kitchen found a pot of hot water on the fire. She prepared and daintily seasoned a small cup of broth from the beef extract and hot water, and crumbling a cracker into it, carried it to Lola. The taste of the savory broth pleased the child's fancy and she took the whole cupful, fed by her loved teacher's hand.

"And now, little one, you will feel better, I think," said Mary, as the child smiled back at her. "And when mother brings you a little cool

milk and a cracker after a while, you will take it like a good child, will you not, dear?"

"Yes, señorita, I shall not be naughty any more, now. And shall I soon be well enough to go to school again? All the girls will have learned so many more verses than I have. Why do you think God made me sick, *maestra?*"

"That is just what I was asking myself and him too, last night" chimed in Juan, the father, who had come in from work and was standing looking down upon his child. "I sat there all night long, because my wife had to keep the baby in the other room, as his fretting disturbed Lolita. And I could not help asking why God was giving so much pain to our innocent little one. I can understand, señorita, why he should give us grown-up ones pain and sorrow of all kinds, for surely we deserve more of both than we get—but that baby there, what has she done?"

"Do you think, Juan, that a wise God, who is ruler of the world he has made as well as Father of his creatures, lets his world go on and on, and grow and improve, without some wise laws for governing it? We think a great deal of his laws for the good of our souls, and we know that if we break one of these laws and *sin*, we shall suffer in some way, from remorse in ourselves, if from no other punishment. Well, he has made 'natural laws,' also, that is, laws that control nature and the life and health of our bodies. Now, if we

should leave Lola to herself for two or three days, and should give her nothing to eat or drink, what would happen?"

"She would die, *pobrecita*," replied the father.

"Yes, surely, and why? From any sin of her heart?"

"No, indeed; only because we should have been careless and neglected her."

"Rather, because the life of her body depends upon the nourishment it receives, as life cannot go on without proper support. You may fix that as one of God's natural laws, Juan. Often we cannot know just what we have done, or what others may have done, to cause distress or disease of the body, but we must know that some law has been violated, sometime, somehow; and God, as a wise ruler, permits the result. Now, perhaps Lola was exposed to the sun during one of those hot days last week, and perhaps she had headache for several days. Still she begged to go to school, and you could not refuse her, even though I sent you word that she seemed feverish and had better be kept at home. She craved cool drinks and later fresh air. You denied them because you thought that they would be dangerous. You simply did not know, you see, although you did your best."

"Then ignorance is one of the causes of sickness and death. Do you mean that, señorita?"

"Ignorance of certain laws and truths concern-

ing our bodily needs, yes; just as much as *soul sin* is, my friend."

"But it is very sad that our children must suffer from simple ignorance, señorita," remarked the mother, who sat on the floor nursing her baby. Lola had dropped asleep now with her question unanswered and forgotten.

"Yes, and that we must bear the penalty of the ignorance and mistakes of others," Mary assented.

"What is to be done about it, I cannot see," sighed Juan. "Now we, wife and I, since we have known you and have heard you talk, have tried to live differently. We are poor, but you taught us that we could be clean as long as there was water to be had. Yet, being clean is not all, even if poor working folks could always keep clean. We are ignorant of all those laws that you have been telling us about, and how can we keep rules that we do not know and have never heard of?"

"True, Juan, you cannot; and you are only one of the many sufferers from the neglect of those who do know. But there is much that you can learn since you can read. There is a little book on 'Health and how to keep it,' that is being translated into Spanish now by a friend of mine, who is as much interested as I am in the needs of people just like you, and she is writing and translating, while I am trying to do what I can."

"And bless your heart for it," interrupted the

woman, her eyes resting gratefully upon her sleeping child.

"Perhaps I can help you by repeating something of what I have already tried to tell you before. A clean body, fed three times a day, with simple, well-cooked food, and rested by eight or nine hours of quiet sleep out of the twenty-four, ought to be a healthy body, strong enough to work ten or twelve hours without fatigue, if there is no disease. Life should be regular, happy, full of love and charity. I believe men's souls would be better if their bodies were kept in better repair."

"Speaking of disease, señorita, have you ever seen the poor little idiot grandchild of old Doña Juana's at your ranch? You know his body is covered with sores, and he smells so badly that no one can stay near him."

"Yes, I have seen him, and have in vain begged the grandmother to let me try to cure him. The whole disease comes from dirt, and the child will perish miserably before very long. As soon as I mentioned soap and water she utterly refused to let me touch him. Of course I do not mean to say that dirt causes all the dreadful diseases that we have in Mexico. It is only among the most ignorant and those who live like the brutes, who do not wash at all. We need more however than a hasty washing of hands and face once or twice a day; we need the refreshing daily bath to open the pores of the skin, then deep, strong breathing

in the fresh air to swell and strengthen the lungs; we need to feel kindly toward our families and our neighbors in order to be happy, and above all, as I heard some one say this morning, we must keep our hearts clean; for as the health of our bodies affects our souls, just so our bodily health depends to a degree upon the soul. And now I must go, friends; I did not mean to stay so long, but it helps me to talk to those who are anxious to learn, and I grow stronger too. So do not let us doubt our Father's love and care for us, even though we do suffer and see the innocent suffer. We can see but a tiny corner of his great world, while we know that he holds the whole universe in the hollow of his hand."

"Yes, yes, señorita; and I can tell you that last night while I watched our Lola, lying so white and weak and scarcely breathing, and while I was asking him why it must be, I really could say the words we read in Sunday-school last Sunday, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' and I knew that even if he did think it best to take our child away from us, I would trust him."

"She will do well now, I think," said Mary, rising. "Coax her to take a cup of milk boiled, please, hot or cold as she likes best, or a cup of the beef-tea, every three or four hours when she does not sleep. See, here is the bottle of 'extract'; put a small spoonful to a cup of hot water with a little salt. If she has no more fever, give her a

little boiled rice to-morrow and the crackers if she likes them. Now good-bye, I must hurry home for school."

As she galloped away, Juan and his wife stood in their doorway gazing after her until horse and rider were but a black speck on the wide, white prairie.

"Bless her!" exclaimed the woman. "If she is not an angel, may I never see one on earth or in heaven."

"Angel? Yes, and dost thou know what the word means, wife? Angel, is messenger, and I am sure that the message she brings comes straight from God. Why has no one like her come to us before? If our parents and grandparents had known what Lola and the baby there will learn, I hope, perhaps thou and I would have been different creatures, wife."

"Well, I am sure I have always tried to take care of my children," said the wife, "but it seems as if I should know how better now."

"And I shall help thee," said Juan, taking his wife's hand affectionately.

CHAPTER IX.

DOÑA RAQUEL'S CONFESSION.

In God's world, for those who are in earnest, *there is no failure.* No work truly done, no word earnestly spoken, no sacrifice freely made, was ever made in vain.—*F. W. Robertson.*

AS Mary neared the ranch she thought she saw several persons standing about the half-finished chapel which had been her refuge from the storm the night before, and which stood at a short distance from the high road on the outskirts of the ranch. Then she became sure that one of the figures was beckoning to her, and she turned the pony's head aside from the road and approached the chapel. The persons proved to be Don Eduardo, his wife, Doña Raquel, and the little boy, Benjamin. They were standing on the warm, sunny side of the building, and the two elders seemed to be discussing something very earnestly.

Don Eduardo came toward the pony and begged that Mary would alight for a moment. The old man was closely wrapped in a coarse red blanket, and his head was tied up in a red cotton handkerchief, surmounted by a broad-brimmed *sombrero.* His dark, wrinkled face beamed with pleasure as

he addressed Miss Summers, for she was a great favorite with him.

"Wilt thou come, Señorita María, and tell my wife what she ought to do? See," he continued, leading Mary around the corner behind the little tower, "this wall is bending inward, and there are great cracks along the adjoining side."

"Yes, I see," answered Mary, after greeting Doña Raquel, who stood a little apart and who was listening somewhat shyly, Mary thought, to what her husband was saying; "but I do not quite understand what either Doña Raquel or I have to do with it. Last night's storm injured the building, it seems." She spoke with her voice raised so that the old man might hear, and he was watching her face earnestly.

"Tell her all about it, Raquel *mia*," he said, turning to his wife; "thou canst make her understand better than I."

"Well, Mariquita," Raquel explained, "it is just this, and I have often wished to talk to thee about it. Thou seest it is I who have promised this chapel to the priest, Padre Esteban." She paused a moment for some expression of surprise from Mary, but none came. She simply sat on a large stone and waited to hear more. "There has never been one in San Bernabé, and the padre at every visit has said what a shame it was that we should be content to go to mass so far away as La Bienvenida, and last December, a year ago, he

became angry and said, in the hearing of the whole village, that unless a chapel was built or some house was turned into a church before his next coming, which will be during this month, he would excommunicate the whole village. Now, José and Petra do not believe that he would have the power to do any such thing, for most of the people, the women at least, are good Catholics, and they say it was only the padre's jealousy and fear of the Protestants that made him speak so boldly. But I believed him, and on the last day of his stay I talked with him privately, and when he left I had promised to have a small chapel at least sufficiently completed for services by the time he should come again. He went away in great good humor, blessing the whole ranch and telling us what great good fortune and happiness would come to us, and how the Virgin would come and dwell among us in spirit, and much more besides. Well, on that day, I set the men to work. Eduardo would have nothing to do with it, of course, but the money was mine, left me by my father, and Eduardo is always good and lets me have my own way in everything, so he did not oppose me. The foundations were dug and the walls were begun before much rain fell, and then for two whole months it rained, and it was impossible to work. José was as eager as I to finish the house, and he fretted sorely at the delay, for he was a good Catholic then, I can tell you."

"Was then," thought Mary to herself. "I wonder what he is now."

"But the *adobes* were all spoiled. There, do you see that great bank of earth out there? That is part of the hundreds of *adobes* that we hauled from El Sago instead of making them here, for the time was short. So all went wrong; for after the rains lessened, the weather grew colder than we have ever known it to be in San Bernabé, and the Chavis baby brought the small-pox from S——, and soon there was scarcely a house where there was not a child sick or dying with it. When the spring came, they began again on the building, and by the time the men had put the crops in the ground, this much," pointing to the wall behind her, "was finished. This has been a long tale, señorita, but I wanted thee to understand it well."

"I am glad you have told me, Doña Raquel. But I cannot understand why I have not known before that you were building the chapel; and if you are, why do you not finish it?"

"That is what I am coming to now," resumed Doña Raquel. She drew nearer to Eduardo and Mary, and raised her voice so that the old man might know how her explanation was progressing. Benjamin rolled in the sun at her feet, and threw stones at the prairie dogs that were popping in and out of their holes near by.

"We have a month longer for the work," con-

tinued Raquel, "for the padre has sent word that he will not be here before Christmas eve, and the weather is fine, and the men almost through with the beans and corn. It can be easily finished in a month, for only the roof and inside work are lacking."

"Well, I suppose that they will begin work again then, if there is nothing to hinder," said Mary, a little impatient at this hindrance, when she was so hungry and the school hour at hand.

"No, José refuses to touch it or to direct the men," declared Raquel. "He says that the walls are dangerous and not fit to hold the heavy beams of the roof."

"True enough," interrupted Eduardo. "José is right. When the wall of my house caved in, and a beam fell and struck my wife and killed her, I vowed to have nothing more to do with soft, insecure walls, and she was José's mother."

"But I believe that that is not José's true reason. He has lost all interest in the chapel, and not only does not wish to help build it, he does not wish to see it built. And, señorita," whispered the woman, turning away shamefacedly from her husband and bending toward Mary's ear, "neither do I. There, I have said it. Now, what is to be done?"

"Doña Raquel," exclaimed Mary, "is it possible that I understand you to mean that you no longer wish to build this chapel because—because

——. Tell me why you have changed your mind?"

"It is this way," replied the woman, bravely. "I have never gone to thy church, though Eduardo has often asked me to go, if only to see that there is no harm done there; but I have never gone. Since thou hast been here, and I have heard thee talk about the right way to honor and worship God and Christ, and since thou hast explained to me and Petra and the other women just what the Holy Bible *does* say of the Virgin Mary, I have found myself thinking strange thoughts. And now I can no longer believe just what Padre Esteban would have me believe. When he comes, I shall not confess to him. He is only a man, and I have not sinned against him. And if the Son of Mary is the only intercessor, as thy Bible says, I shall pray no longer to her. God is my judge, and his Son is my Saviour, and besides these there is no other." She paused, almost breathless, and a fire of enthusiasm glowed in her deeply set dark eyes.

Mary grasped her hand, speechless. Eduardo looked his satisfaction and patted his wife's other hand.

"Softly, wife, softly!" he said. "I think the señorita understands now, and thou must not let thyself get excited. Thou must think what thou wilt do."

Mary recognized in this confession of Raquel

the result of a long period of struggle and earnest thought. How little she had realized what was going on in this quiet woman's heart, as she went silently about her work at home. She remembered now the intentness of the gaze which Raquel had fixed upon her often in the small weekly "mothers' meetings" which she had been induced to attend. She had had no listener more encouraging, but the woman had never cared, herself, to talk about her religious belief. And now if the eyes of this one were opening to the light, surely Petra, who had long inclined toward the simplicity and beauty of the newly taught religion, would follow her, and even perhaps José. Those three, of so much influence in the ranch, could help her to do away with much of the disfavor in which Protestantism was held there.

"Dear Raquel," murmured Mary, rising, for it was now past the hour for opening school. "You have given me more happiness than I have ever known before. We will ask God to help us in what we are to do. You have asked for my advice, and as we must try to act wisely in this matter, you must give me a little time to think. Be sure to come to the 'mothers' meeting' this afternoon, and in the evening I will go to you, and when all of us are together, we will talk of this. I hope that José will be present also."

The others agreed to this without hesitation, and Mary left them still basking in the sun, while

she hurried back to the pony. As she slipped her arm through the bridle to lead him to the house, she passed the door of the tower which rose just behind that part of the building near which the foregoing conversation had been held. She was considerably startled when a harsh voice accosted her from the interior, and then the uncouth figure of old Juana appeared in the doorway.

"Aha, little white-skinned *gringa!*" she cried, "did I not tell you the truth? And the Holy Virgin, bless her! did preserve you in the storm. Is it not so? And here within her own walls you found safety, you and the soldier Daniel!"

Mary stood still, shocked by the look of fury on the woman's face, which grew more intense as she continued.

"But by all the saints, I swear that she will not preserve you in that other storm that is to come. Who are *you*, little Protestant witch, to come here, and with your pretty face and soft voice bewitch all the house of Vera, so that they give themselves over to perjury and deny their vows? Mother of God! But if this chapel is not finished and ready for the padre, a curse will be upon you and upon all whom you have led astray! And I can tell you that there are others here who feel as I do." She ceased speaking from want of breath, and stood, a threatening figure framed by the doorway, while the idiot grandchild peered, grinning, from behind the grandmother's skirts.

Mary believed the old woman crazed, and thought it best to take no notice of her fierce words, so she walked steadily on toward the road after the first pause of dismay.

"Juana ought to be looked after," she thought to herself. "She gets worse and worse, and some day she will be dangerous. I must speak to Raquel about her. How tired I am, and hungry too."

When she reached the schoolhouse all was quiet inside, and she found Refugio in her chair, while all the scholars sat contentedly with their books in hand.

"Thank you, Refugio!" she said, stopping for an instant; "I am glad you were so thoughtful. I was detained and it is long past two o'clock. Keep the children quiet awhile longer, for I must get a mouthful to eat, before I come back. Carlos, get on the pony, my boy, and take her to the stables. Poor Blanquilla is hungry and thirsty too."

Mary did not find herself quite so hungry as she supposed, when she sat down before the dinner which Petra brought smoking from the kitchen. She could not eat.

"A slice of grandmother's white loaf-bread, with good, fresh butter would taste better than all these mixtures. I am tired of beans and eggs and tortillas," she thought.

The words were childish, she knew, but she felt

homesick, weary, and as if the responsibilities of the day were growing too heavy for her own weak shoulders alone. Her joy at Raquel's confession was shadowed by the realization now of what dissensions this defection from the common cause would create in the community, and old Juana's words, insane though they were, seemed to threaten something like danger to the good people who were sheltering her. A heavy thud on the roof overhead made her start with something like terror, but the next moment she remembered that José was having the roof repaired to-day prior to the winter rains, and that the noise was only the emptying of a load of earth on the roof of her room. She laughed then at her nervousness, and chided herself for the momentary lapse from the trust in God her Father, who alone could give the necessary confidence and strength for what was before her. Promising herself a cup of tea after school for refreshment and strength, she left the almost untasted dinner and before resuming her hat, shut herself in her quiet bedroom. Whatever happened within, she came out a few minutes later, with peace and content restored to her face and a song upon her lips.

Juanito Vera nestled close against her shoulder during the last half-hour of school that afternoon, and she noticed that the hand he laid upon her arm was dry and hot, while his beautiful eyes looked dim and drowsy. He was ready with his

verse, however, and the other little ones grew very still as he repeated it. Somehow they loved to hear the little talk between their teacher and Juan, which always accompanied his verse, for he often asked a quaint question, or gave unexpected replies to the teacher's inquiries. He was a strange, thoughtful child, and his first liking for Mary had grown into an adoration very pretty to see, and as she had hoped, had resulted in a nearer acquaintance with the mother, Martina, who had married a nephew of old Vera. Martina was still shy, and had never yet visited Mary, or attended worship in the schoolhouse; but Mary had been to her house several times, and had learned something of the woman's saddened life. Of four sons, only Juan remained, and he was her only joy in the little home, where the husband and father was worse than worthless.

This afternoon, after repeating the verse which had been given him to learn, his eyes brightened a little, and he said, eagerly :

"Mamma and I found another verse last night, while papa was out. We found it in my little Testament which you gave me, and I think it is such a beautiful one. Listen : 'We love him, because he first loved us.' I think all the verses about love are so beautiful. Do you not?"

"Indeed I do, dear child," Mary replied. "But who is it, Juan, who loved us first?"

"Mamma asked me, and I told her that I was sure

it was the Christ, because he loves us better than anybody in the world can, and he has done so much for us that we just cannot help loving him."

"And did mamma also think it was Jesus?"

"At first she said that it must mean the Holy Virgin, because the church teaches that it is she who loves the world best, but I showed her that it was *he* not *she* in the book, and she said it must be as I had said. Was I right, señorita?"

"Yes, Juan; and never forget it, children," she said, looking tenderly into all the dark eyes lifted to her own. "The dear Saviour loves us more than we can imagine. He loves you so that he is sad when you are sick or sinful, and he has done what he could to save you from sickness and from sin."

"Does he love me as much as my mamma does?" asked Emilia, a bright-eyed midget of six years.

"More, much more, my dear child. And he is always patient and forgiving if we are sorry when we do wrong, and if we ask him to forgive us."

"Does he know when I cry when grandmamma beats me?" asked another girl with a white, pinched face and ragged clothes.

"He sees every tear, Lucia, and he knows how to comfort you if you will only tell him that you want him to comfort and help you."

"How good he must be, and how I love him," sighed Juan.

"Well, I just can't love him," exclaimed a tall

girl, in a defiant tone, "because I have never seen him, and I do not know what he looks like nor where he is. And the picture we used to have of him hanging in our house was too dreadful for any one to love. *I* shall wait till I see him before I say that I love him."

"He loves you, my dear, even though you do not know him yet," returned her teacher, softly, as she went to the organ for the closing hymn, and without giving the girl time to reply she began to sing

Jesus, lover of my soul,

in a low, tender voice. Noticing that Juan did not join in with the others, she looked down at the little fellow at her elbow and saw his eyes brimming over with tears.

CHAPTER X.

FRIENDSHIP'S PROOF.

A friend loveth at all times.—Prov. 17 : 17.

WHEN, the same afternoon, Mary and her faithful shadow, Refugio, entered the house where the women and girls gathered each week for simple study of the Bible with the young missionary, the room was nearly full. It was in the home of one of the church-members, who was rather better off than most of the little band, and who had a large *sala* opening directly upon the road. The women were sitting on stools or chairs on the earth floor, and some on the low bed, and others in the doorway. Several babies lay crowing at their mothers' feet, and a huge rooster was tied by one leg to a table in a dark corner. All were talking at a great rate, and there were several new faces among the usual comers. Only Raquel sat silent, quietly knitting away at a coarse woolen sock for her husband. Mary noticed with pleasure Martina's spare figure sitting by Petra, while the latter was playing with the infant of another woman, trotting it on her knee.

When the young teacher entered the chattering was hushed, Raquel laid by her knitting, while

the babies sucked their thumbs and kicked little bare legs in the air unconcernedly. The little organ had been brought from the schoolhouse and soon the music of the women's voices, led by Mary and the organ, floated out upon the crisp afternoon air, and here and there along the street a man's voice hummed the familiar words. José sat in the deserted court-yard of his father's house, busy in fashioning a huge wooden bolt for the bulging doors of the barn, now full to overflowing with the winter supplies of corn and beans, and he smiled as he caught himself whistling in time with the singing voices the opening hymn, a translation of "Rock of Ages." After a prayer and another hymn or two, Mary was silent for an instant, and that instant carried an earnest prayer to the Father for help and wisdom in talking with these women whose hearts were opening to instruction.

"Dear friends," she began, while every eye was fixed upon her face, "we are going to talk together a little while this afternoon about a very familiar subject, about something that is very pleasant to think of, and about which you all know something. For I do not believe that there is one here, not a grown woman, nor a girl, nor even a little baby who has not a *friend*, one friend at least. We will talk a little about friends and friendship. Doña Berta," she said, addressing the woman of the house, who sat at Raquel's side,

"tell us, please, what a friend is, what your idea is of a good, true friend."

"Why, señorita," replied the woman, flushing a little, as the eyes of all turned upon her and some lips smiled, "a friend is some one whom we love."

"And who loves us," added Raquel, gravely.

"Yes," said Mary, with a smile, "that is right, for there must be love of some kind where there is friendship."

"A friend is one who does us a favor," interrupted a young girl, on the other side of the room.

"What do the rest of you think of that? Is one always a friend who does us a good turn?" asked Mary.

"No," replied Berta, "for we pay for many favors, and even an enemy will do one a favor for a price."

"I know what you meant, Sara," Miss Summers replied, smiling at the girl, who was looking rather mortified. "And your idea was good. You meant that a friend is one who seeks our good, who is kind to us; one who is not willing to let slip an opportunity for helping us when we need help."

"Yes," returned Sara, "that is what I meant; only I did not say just what I wished to say."

"Now," continued Mary, after everybody had been given an opportunity to say something about friendship, and most had responded, "if I have a friend, and I know that she has any particular

wish about anything that I may say or do, what do I do for this friend? Just what she wishes?"

"If that should be right," interrupted Refugio, earnestly.

"Yes; and we will suppose that my friend is wise and good, and only wishes the right thing. Now, suppose that what seems to my friend good for me does not seem so to me; perhaps it may seem quite the contrary."

"If you love her you will do it all the same," said Raquel, with a thoughtful look in her eyes, which had not left Mary's face.

"You must trust her, and then it will seem right to you if you love her, as Doña Raquel says," added old Berta.

"Then, suppose my friend, whom I must trust as you say, and whom I certainly love, if she is my friend—suppose this dear friend should require of me some very *hard* thing to do; something which seems impossible, which seems even dangerous and like death to me, what must I do?"

"Do the thing," said a firm voice; and Mary was not surprised to hear Raquel answer thus.

"I think it would be a fine thing to prove one's friendship by doing some very hard thing, do you not, señorita?" asked Sara, with glowing cheeks.

"Yes, I do, Sara; and we cannot give a stronger proof of friendship to a friend than by doing some difficult thing which that friend may require of us. What do you think would be the

greatest test of friendship between two friends, Petra?" she questioned.

The young woman looked down upon the little ones rolling upon the floor, then out through the doorway toward the mountains, where the purple mists of evening were already beginning to gather.

"The hardest thing would be to die, it seems to me," she replied, at length. It cost the reticent woman a struggle to utter even this short sentence in public, and she almost choked over the last words.

"Do you know, my friends, what the wisest book in the world says about this? Why, just what our Petra has said. Listen, while I read: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' That is very plain, is it not? The greatest proof of love is that one is willing to give his life, and not only is willing, but really does give his life for a friend. Has such a thing ever happened? Yes, it has happened many, many times, for even human love is sometimes strong enough for that. You would die for your baby, Doña Luisa, I am sure," to a woman who sat nursing a chubby boy, "if it were necessary."

"And I for Juanito," said Martina, as if forgetting herself in these sweet, new thoughts.

"What would you think of a king's son who should leave all the comforts and delights of his father's palace," continued their teacher, "and

should go to live among his father's poor, ignorant subjects just because he felt sorry for their poverty and ignorance and wished to teach them to be wiser and better and healthier and happier? Would that be friendship?"

"Oh, yes!" replied several.

"And suppose that, although he should be loved and obeyed by a few of the people, most would hate and persecute him so much as even to threaten to kill him, and he should still stay among them, returning good for their evil, and helping them in every way he could, would that be friendship?

"And then," and Mary's voice grew very solemn, "if those who hated him should finally kill him in their hatred and wickedness, what would you think of such love?"

"She is speaking of the Lord Jesus," whispered Sara to her companion, a younger girl.

"A king's son would not do such a thing," said the young mother Luisa.

"A King's Son has done it," Mary replied. "Our Saviour, the Son of God, has given us just such proofs of his love for us, who without a knowledge of him are weak and ignorant and sinful. And now, as it is growing late, we cannot talk much more about this, but I want to tell you a message that he left for all of his friends here on earth. This is it: 'Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.' Do you wish to be

the Saviour's friends? Obey him; do what he tells you to do. Are you his friends? Then prove it by obedience, even though obedience bring hardship, suffering, or even *death!*" A thrill passed through the little assemblage at these earnest, simple words, and Raquel's stern, set lips relaxed into a peaceful smile, while tears fell from Petra's eyes upon the tiny face of the baby upon her lap.

After they had separated, one of the new-comers said to her companion, as they walked quietly homeward:

"And is that the kind of sermon she preaches? Why, I thought she would be railing against the padre, and the Holy Virgin, and the saints, and telling us we were all lost, if we did not go to her *cultos*. But there, it was very different, and I shall go again next Friday and hear some more. It can do one no harm to hear that kind of talk."

The house had recovered its usual quiet now, as all of the guests had returned to their homes, Captain Daniel accompanying Angela on a visit to her father's house in La Providencia. Since the cool nights had begun, all of the house doors were closed early in the evening, and the court, instead of being the sociable family sitting room as usual, was dark and quiet. The moon had not yet appeared after supper when Mary crossed from her room to the *sala*, and the stars were brightly

sparkling in the dark, blue sky. Even the dogs had crept into some haven of warmth and shelter from the wintry air, and the ranch was quiet, though it was only eight o'clock. José was sitting at the table in the center of the room, with books and pencil, when Miss Summers entered, and soon both were struggling with the difficulties of teaching and learning English. It was the first time that week that an English lesson had been possible, with the confused coming and going of the visitors, and José had not been able to study as usual. Petra had not yet come in from the kitchen, and Raquel alone was with her step-son. Don Eduardo was cold and could not be induced to leave the little charcoal fire in the kitchen until the time when the Señorita María and José should be at leisure to talk over the affair broached that morning. Raquel sat silently knitting, while José labored over his grammar exercise. He laid down his pencil with a sigh of relief as his teacher took a seat at his side and received the book from his hand.

"It seems more difficult than usual, to-night, señorita. And what I have written is not worth looking at."

"Well, there is not much of it, I see," she replied, "and we shall soon get through with it. Ah, see here, this is naturally very difficult for you, but in English we do not make the adjective agree in number with the noun, as in

Spanish. We do not say, as you have written it: '*Goods* children obey their parents.' No, the adjective is unchangeable and I will strike off the *s*. I am glad you remembered the *position* of the adjective." And thus they went through the half-dozen sentences prepared.

"Now instead of more grammar, we will talk for a little in English, as you like to do, and which will be good practice. You know many words and already read surprisingly well, but you cannot yet pronounce. Now, not a word of Spanish. About what shall we talk?"

"I have so much shame, Miss Mary," replied the young man, blushing to the roots of his hair; "because I cannot speak your language well. But I have many desires to learn it."

"And you will very soon learn it, I am sure, if you are not ashamed to speak it. Now, why do you wish to learn English?"

"Because I have the hope of going to the—the *Estados Unidos*—how is it said? I forget myself."

"The United States, you mean, and you did not forget *yourself*, José, it was the words that you forgot. What will you do when you go to the United States, I wonder."

"'Wonder'? What is that? I do not understand."

"Ah, yes. Well, never mind about 'wonder.' Why do you wish to leave Mexico?"

"I have heard of the fines schools and colleges there, and that a young man has manys opportunities to be great and famous in those States."

"José, José! *Fines* and *manys!*

"Oh, I forgot my——, no, I forgot, Miss Mary. I should have said fine and many. It is very, very difficult, your language. I wish to be great. I wish to learn all that a young man may learn, but not in Mexico, not in the city, to be only a fine nobody, like my nephew Daniel, no!"

"But José, you need not be like Daniel. Surely you know better than that. And I believe that you will——. Why, Doña Raquel, what *is* the matter?" she added, as she saw the woman sitting upright in her chair, letting her knitting fall into her lap, and staring with wide-opened eyes at José.

"The English," cried José, laughing heartily; "is it not *mamá mía?*"

"What is that you two are saying? Is it talk? It is to me like the language of the animals to one another. Can it be true that you are saying anything, that there is any sense in what you say!"

"You have not heard it before, Raquel?" asked Mary. "Why, José and I have often spoken thus in our lessons."

"And I sat dozing in my chair! I cannot understand how such jargon can be talk, real human talk. And do you like it, señorita, with those tongue-twisting sounds?"

"Why, mamma, it is her own language, just as Spanish is ours."

"But she speaks Spanish also, and as well as we do. How can one person speak two tongues? Of course I knew she had her own language, but I never thought it could be like that. Listen, father," she cried, as Eduardo entered, followed by Petra with the sleeping Benjamin in her arms, "our José can talk the señorita's talk. It does not seem to mean anything, but they understand each other. I never should have guessed that José was so clever."

All laughed at this, and then the old man sat down by his wife's side and silence fell over the little company. José scribbled meaningless figures on a scrap of paper, and looked impenetrable. All the lightness and youth had left his face which grew graver and graver.

"Stop knitting now, Raquel," demanded Eduardo, in a business-like tone, for a little nap over the brazier in the kitchen had refreshed him, and his wits were evidently in the right place. When once aroused from the torpor and listlessness of old age, which was slowly creeping over his faculties, he was still a shrewd man.

"Yes," assented Raquel, laying aside her work; "I shall knit no more to-night. José and Petra, listen. You both know of my vow concerning the chapel, and that I have talked with you to-day about carrying on the work. Now I ask you no

longer to help me, for I have decided the matter for myself. I shall not finish the chapel."

Again there was silence in the room. Presently, to the surprise of all, Eduardo rose to his feet and spoke again, firmly and cheerfully.

"Raquel, thou hast decided rightly. I said nothing to thee, for on the day when I joined the Baptists I promised thee that I would let thee go thy own way. The money was thine and thy will was thine. But I knew that some day thou wouldst know the truth, and better by my praying to God for thee than by hauling and pulling thee along after me. And now that thou hast given thy word to have no more to do with the building of the chapel, wilt thou go no farther? Wife, art thou going to stand still with thy feet in one road and thy heart in another?"

"No, Eduardo, *esposo mio*,"[1] answered the woman, and she arose and stood by him. "I wish to serve God in the true way. If I have erred and worshiped those who should not have had his place in my heart, I am sorry with all my heart, and I shall give all that up and learn the señorita's way."

"And that way, dear Raquel, is only the way that our Saviour has taught us," said Mary, with emotion in her voice.

"You made me feel this afternoon, when you talked to us about Christ's friendship and love for

[1] My husband.

us, as if I should be the vilest wretch in the world, if I did not love and honor him above all others. I decided then," she ended, happily.

"And Petra," said Mary, on an impulse, turning and laying her hand lovingly on the arm of the young woman at her side; "you will be with us too, will you not? You know that we are trying to follow our Master simply and truly, and that we have the truth about all this from the Bible. Will you not believe that he alone is your Saviour and able to satisfy your soul?"

"I believe that already, Mariquita," replied Petra, quietly; "I have only been waiting for mother to speak."

"Oh, what happiness!" exclaimed Mary, with shining eyes. "And José, can you not also——?"

But he interrupted her, raising his hand as if to ward off a blow.

"Do not ask me anything, señorita; I cannot deceive you, and yet I cannot say what you wish me to say; not yet," he added. And then he hurried from the room.

"The chapel might be turned into one for ourselves," began Eduardo; "we need a larger——"

"No, no, Don Eduardo," interrupted Mary; "I do not think it will do to speak of that just yet. We must wait until Mr. Richards comes again before engaging in anything of such importance as that would be. I think that we should only be raising needless opposition by continuing the

work for our own use. At any rate it will not be long now before he comes, and he will tell us what we should do."

"Mariquita is right, I think, father," said Petra; "for while you manage the ranch, you do not, as you said of mother, govern the will of the people. It will take careful management and much wisdom to make them understand."

"Well, let it be then," replied the old man. "Perhaps you are right. José will simply tell the men that you have decided not to finish the chapel at all; it is only honest for that, at least, to be well understood. And then we shall see."

The young teacher was not sure that she was satisfied with this way of managing what she was convinced would prove a delicate affair, but it was really the best that could be done, and Mr. Richards had written that he would be with her in a few weeks. It was now only the first of December, and the Roman Catholic priest would not arrive before Christmas. She stopped a moment by the well in the center of the court as she went to her room a few moments later, and filled her lungs with the pure, cold mountain air as it swept down from the peaks shadowing the village. The moon was rising, round and red, over the mountain side, and already the stars were paling before her greater light. As she moved on toward her door, she almost stumbled over a figure which sat on the low curbing of the well. It was José, and

as he rose, he looked more dejected than Mary had ever seen him.

"Señorita María," he said, as she started violently at his unexpected appearance. "I only wanted to say to you what I could not say in there before the others, so I waited outside here for you."

"What is it, José?" asked Mary, wearily. It seemed as if she could scarcely bear anything more just then. The day had been full of experiences such as she had not known before in Mexico, and she was physically exhausted.

"I shall not detain you. It is only that I wished to explain that when you asked me in there if I also would not join you, I wanted to say yes; but, señorita, it is different with us men, with me, from what it is with our women. They are born religious, I believe; at any rate they are accustomed to think about the church, and the mass, and the saints and all that, all their lives, and for them the change is not so difficult; when once they are convinced that they have been wrong, they have only to choose another way of being religious. Now I never have had any thoughts about religion and never have cared anything about it, either way. I was willing for my father to be a Protestant, and for my mother to be a Romanist——"

"But José, your mother says that you are a good Catholic!"

"That was only because I never make fun of the priest, as so many men do, and because I have never forgotten the prayers and the catechism taught me when I was a child. It is not hard to be a 'good Catholic,'" and he laughed somewhat bitterly. "But now *I* have changed," he continued. "I hardly know when it began, but I do think I begin to see the wrong, the real error of our country's religion in this one thing: *I do not find that it influences the people to lead good lives.* They are taught to be charitable. Why? To get their own souls after death, or those of their friends, out of purgatory. It teaches them to lie and to deceive. And in the large cities, Daniel says it has grown to be a mere question of money between the church and the people. Now you, señorita," and his voice lost the hard tone and his face brightened, "have been showing me something different. You have taught me how men ought to live, so as to carry out the will of God. You have not said much to me, but enough to make me think. And I have thought enough to make me *know* that you are right and enough to make me desire to be like you, and to try and lead the kind of life a good man ought to lead. You see, señorita, I wish to understand it all, but I cannot be sure that I do. Do you understand?"

"I do, José, and I sympathize with you, my friend. God is leading you, and you will find the

truth, I am sure. Now, good-night, for it is growing late."

José then returned to his family, and agreed with Petra that Miss Summers' plan was right and best for all.

"There will be enough said about giving up the chapel," he said; "and we will be quiet and give the people no more than necessary to discuss at once. Mr. Richards will be able to arrange it with less dissatisfaction than we. We will make no secret of our change of purpose, and will answer any question that they may put to us. You have abandoned the work, mamma, because you do not wish to pay your vow to the Virgin, as you have given up her worship. You are prepared, I hope, for what is to follow, for our friends will of course demand the reason why."

"Yes, José; and it seems to me a very simple thing to say, 'I am going to join the señorita's religion and pray to God and Christ alone, therefore I cannot build a chapel for the service of Mary.' I think they will understand."

"There is no doubt about that, *mamá mía*," added Petra, "and I believe that there are many who will agree with us. What Mariquita has told us ever since she came to us seems to me so simple and true that I wonder how any one can find fault with it."

"They do find fault however, Petra," remarked José, after the parents had left the room and the

brother and sister were alone, "and there will be more trouble than you imagine. Most of the women will be furious, for you know yourself the influence of Padre Esteban over them. Perhaps," he added, sarcastically, "his influence would not be so great if he were not young and handsome!"

"But the men, José, they are not fanatical. They scarcely ever go to mass, and many do not confess any longer—that is, the younger men like you. And look at brother Daniel. He has no use for Padre Esteban."

"Look at his wife, Petra; there is not a better Romanist in the ranch than Rosa, and she rules her husband and hates the Señorita María."

"Mariquita has spoken to me to-day about old Juana. She thinks, José, that she should be watched, and it really seems strange what a violent way she has had several times lately with the señorita. Has María told you how she behaved yesterday while we were away at the picnic and María was alone with her, and of her strange behavior and words to-day?"

"No; what has that old hag to do with the señorita?"

Petra told him of the crazy words of the woman, which had half amused, half startled Mary, and José remained thoughtful for a moment.

"I shall see to it," he replied at length. "Perhaps Rosa has had something to do with all that.

They are great cronies, I know, and are often gossiping together."

"Nothing can hurt us, of course," remarked Petra, as she closed the shutters and blew out the candles; "but I do not wish the señorita frightened away. Mr. Richards will not consent to her staying longer, if things grow unpleasant."

"I think we can take care of the señorita, Petra," said José, as he returned his sister's good-night.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LITTLE LAMB GOES HOME.

I am glad to think
I am not bound to make the wrong go right,
But only to discover and to do
With cheerful heart the work that God appoints;
I will trust in him
That he can hold his own; and I will take
His will, above the work he sendeth me,
To be my chiefest good.

—*Jean Ingelow.*

ANOTHER December morning broke clear and cold, and Mary awaked, wondering what was the uncomfortable weight upon her spirits, and what could cause the strange sinking of her heart. Surely something had happened not at all in keeping with the pure, bright sunniness of the outside world, something remaining from the black shadows of the night! After dressing, she stood at her window, looking listlessly out upon the empty street, awaiting Refugio's summons to breakfast. Before going to sleep she had been reading some chapters from Auerbach's "On the Heights," and her feeling of discouragement now found an echo in the memory of some of the last words read; they had lingered in her mind, and though she blamed herself for her depression, and sought to find in-

spiration in the joy that had been hers, yesterday, at the news of Raquel's and Petra's conversion to the Protestant faith, she seemed to herself such a small and helpless being, the great questions dividing the human race seemed so insoluble and hopeless and unnecessary, that her memory inevitably recurred to these disturbing words from the book: "What do we really do in the world? The trees would grow without us; the animals, in the field and in the air and in the water, would live without us. Everything has of itself something to do in the world; man alone must make himself something to do. And so we paint and build and plough and study and practise for mutual manslaughter, and the only difference between man and beast is that men bury their dead."

Fully realizing the heterodoxy of this sentiment and its unworthiness as an influence upon the faith of a child of God, it still haunted her thoughts and shadowed her face. The truth was, that the reaction after an exciting, too full yesterday, followed by a restless night of planning, was telling upon her strong nerves, and she sat down to her breakfast with an aching head and little appetite. Refugio's first words did not take from her general feeling of uneasiness.

"Have you been vaccinated, señorita?"

"Yes, indeed; many times since I have been in Mexico. Why do you ask me that, Refugio?"

"Because they were saying out there in the

court that you were sure to have been vaccinated. I do not know what it means at all; but they said that if you had been you could not have the small-pox."

"No, there is no danger that I shall have it now, even if I should be exposed to it. And I have already seen many cases of it while I was in S—— last year. But why are they talking of this now?"

"Only that Juanito Vera is sick, and they think it may be small-pox."

"Why should it be small-pox?" inquired Mary, hastily; "there is none here, and it is only beginning in S——, where they have it every year. And no one has come from there with it."

"They think that Martina's sister's baby, in La Bienvenida, died with it. Do you not remember that Juanito went with his mother to the burial, about ten days ago? He had to be absent from school that afternoon, and his mother said that he cried all the way to the town, because he did not want to go."

"Ten days ago," murmured Mary, thoughtfully, "then it is just time now," she said aloud, a little vaguely.

"Doña Martina found him in a convulsion when she got home from the meeting yesterday afternoon. She had left him playing with the boys in the road, and did not think he was sick much, as he often has a pain in his head. He was

on the floor in a fit when she got home, and his papa was sitting by, too drunk to call any one. She was going to send for you, but some say that old Juana came by just then and said that he would surely die if you were called, and that it was a judgment on his mother for having left him to go to the mothers' meeting. Señorita, do not look so! Of course, that was all a lie. Everybody thinks now that it is the small-pox, and that he took it from the baby. Console yourself, dear señorita, and try to eat. See, the eggs are so fresh and good, and the bread is fresh too, for the cart came this morning from the oven and has brought such beautiful loaves and twists."

"No, no, Refugio," she returned, "I cannot eat now. Go on and tell me all that you know. Who is taking care of poor little Juan?"

"Old Juana, and she knows all about it, they say. She has not left the house at all, and señorita, you will not go there, will you?" pleaded Refugio, looking anxiously into her friend's pale face.

"Of course I shall go to see Juan, Refugio," she replied; "he will want me and I am sure I can make him more comfortable than that——" she interrupted herself, and then sprang hastily to her feet.

"You have never been vaccinated, Cuca. How fortunate it is that I wrote for fresh points last week. And to think how disappointed I was

yesterday that the mail brought no letters, only the package of vaccine. Come, roll up your sleeve ; I will begin with you, and then you must go to the mothers of all the school children, and say that I wish to vaccinate to-day all who have not had the disease. Quick, we shall have a busy day."

All depression was gone now, for there was something to do after all, besides "bury the dead." She calmly and quickly went about her preparations with the light of energy in her face.

She opened the medicine closet. Carefully arranged on the shelves were bottles of antiseptic preparations ready for solution, jars of antiseptic gauze and of vaseline, rolls and rolls of bandages of different widths and materials, and sponges. Small drawers contained syringes and simple surgical instruments, and larger ones bundles of old linen cloths, worn sheets, and underclothing. In the inner cupboard were ranged medicines in bottles and boxes, and all was in perfect order.

"You will eat now, señorita," said Refugio, when the vaccination was over, and the girl was smiling again. "It is early yet, and you have tasted nothing."

"Yes, I shall eat now," replied Mary, sitting down again at the table; "and Refugio," she called after the girl, who was starting on her errand, "ask Petra to come to me for a few moments. I wish to speak with her."

From her conversation with Petra, who came

as soon as she received the summons, she learned that it was not yet certain, but most probable, that Juan had small-pox. His fever was very high, and he was delirious, though as yet there was no eruption. Petra did not tell Mary that the child called continually for her, and had to be watched constantly to prevent him from rushing out of the room to run to the schoolhouse. She hoped that Mary would not hear of this, and that she might be kept altogether from the house. So she told her of Juana's presence with the sick boy, and of the mother's frantic despair, and wild denunciations of herself for having attended the meeting of the day before. She had lost three sons of the same disease during the epidemic of the year before.

"But that was before we were all vaccinated," continued Petra, "so all of the children except Juan took the disease. Juan was with Angela in La Providencia, when the plague arrived, and they vaccinated him there, and did not send him home till late in the spring. But the vaccine did not take, I have heard Martina say, and only yesterday she was saying that she wished to have it done again."

"Poor child," sighed Mary, grieved at the fate of her little favorite. "I shall go and see what I can do for him. What *do* they do here for such an awful sickness, Petra?"

"Nothing much, but keep out the air and light

The little ones generally die with the throat and nose full of the sores. I saw one child last year lying on a mat without a rag over it, and the terrible sores covered it so that one could see nothing else. I hope never to see such a sight again. It was nearly dead then."

"How perfectly inhuman!" shuddered Mary. "But is nothing done, no bathing, nothing to give a little ease?"

"There is very little that can be done, señorita. Most of the people are poor, and we are so far from a doctor. It always seemed to me that it would be a comfort to have the fever in the head cooled by wet cloths, and that some of the dreadful itching and burning afterward might be helped by bathing, but such a thing has never been heard of here. They are not neglected, the poor sick things; but there does not seem anything to do but give them what they can manage to eat and drink, and then sit by and watch."

"It is true that there is no remedy for the disease, but there is much that good nursing and cleanliness can do to lessen the suffering and the serious after effects. Tell me if there are many who will be liable to take this from little Juan. If so, there ought to be something done to prevent a spread of the disease. In this pure, fresh air, there ought not to be an epidemic from only this one case."

"I think that there is not the danger that there

was last year, señorita," replied José, whom Petra called as he was passing the door and to whom the question was repeated. "Almost all the older inhabitants have already had it, or have been vaccinated. Do you remember how well our arms 'took' last winter, Petra, and how ill Benjamin was with his? Then I vaccinated all of us over again, to be sure that there was no 'humor' left, and it did not take again. So we are safe. But you, señorita?"

"I am safe, also," she replied, "and as I have nursed small-pox in a New York hospital, I do not fear for myself. Now, what about the children, and the babies who have come since the sickness last year?"

"There are many yet who would have it, if exposed, for the parents of some were afraid when the official was here vaccinating, and they hid their children, or pretended that they had already had the disease. Of course the babies, as you say, are not safe. What shall I do, Petra? Ride over to La Providencia for vaccine? They are sure to have it."

"No, no," said Miss Summers. "See, I have enough points, fresh, reliable ones, for a regiment. You and I can vaccinate the whole ranch before night. And," she added, after thinking a moment, "I think that I could not spend the day better. What do you say; cannot some one get on a horse and ride to every house here and in El Porvenir to

save time, and beg all to bring children who have not been vaccinated, to the schoolhouse? I have already send Cuca to the school children. Surely, last year's warning will give them more sense, and they cannot refuse."

"You are right, señorita," declared José, seizing his hat, "I will go myself through San Bernabé and will send to El Porvenir. But first," he added, more slowly, "you must vaccinate yourself again. I shall not go until that is done." And Petra added a like plea.

To humor them and to hasten their plans, she laughingly assented and rolled back her loose sleeve upon the fair white roundness of her arm.

In a moment it was done, and they separated, each intent upon the duties which the day was unfolding ready to their hands.

There was little for the young teacher to do, until some response should be made to the summons to the schoolhouse; so she arranged her bag, with the necessary articles for the work before her, and started to the schoolhouse, meaning to stop and see Juan, on the way.

Groups of men and women stood idly about in the open space which did duty as garden of the ranch, and many turned with unfriendly looks toward her, as she left the gate. Those who had been engaged on the chapel building before, had expected to be hired again, and now that the outside work in the fields was done, the time had

come for resuming work. Great had been their dismay when José had announced to them that morning, just before he had been with Miss Summers, that his mother had decided not to complete the building, and that he would not need their services. He had spoken pleasantly, but decidedly, and the men, even those of his own family, stood enough in awe of him not to utter the thoughts and suspicions which quickly arose in their minds.

When, therefore, they saw the teacher quietly go toward the schoolhouse, as usual, one among them said:

"And the Señorita María is to be allowed to go on unhindered in her miserable, proselyting ways. I wager that this is *her* work."

"You may be sure of it," added a woman. "And who is *she*, to teach that we must not pray to the holy mother of God, because, as she says, she was only a woman and mother like the rest of us, while she lets herself be made an idol of by the Vera family?"

"Leave me out, if you please," called the deep voice of Doña Rosa Vera, Captain Daniel's mother. "I have always known that she was a smooth-faced little viper, who has crawled into the nest of papa-in-law Eduardo. I thought better of my mother-in-law, who has always been so good a Catholic, and was so free with her vows last year to the padre."

"Perhaps it is only the small-pox," suggested a

pretty little woman, one of those who had attended the meeting the day before with her fat baby boy. She liked the señorita, and did not wish her to be blamed for such a dire offense.

"All the more reason why we should work for the Virgin," snapped a vicious-looking old dame, who crouched over a few live coals which she held in an earthen pan in her lap. "Did not the plague cease last year so soon as the men got to work again upon the church? You are one of the Protestants thyself, Luisa, and you had better look out for thy little one, or the breath of the evil one will be upon him."

"That I shall, Catarina *mía*," declared Luisa, stoutly hugging her baby, and covering his shiny brown face with kisses. "I heard the señorita's Refugio telling Sara's mother that there would be vaccination to-day at the schoolhouse, and I shall carry my Pablito. There, there," she cried, hushing her child, who nestled hungrily against her bosom; "the señorita's white hands will not hurt my boy, but she will save him from the dreadful small-pox. Come, let us go, little one!" and she actually started, following Mary at a little distance, notwithstanding the gibes thrown after her by the crowd, led by old Catarina.

"Bold-faced hussy!" sneered Doña Rosa; "it is like her bad blood to be throwing her impudence into our very faces. When her Pablo is old enough to speak, ask him what sort of man his

father is, and where he has kept himself all this while, and then——"

"Rosita, Rosita!" whispered old Catarina, "hush, here is José; he will hear you, and you know he does not like such talk."

When Luisa with her baby was but a few yards behind Mary, she stopped and sat down upon a stone by the roadside, for she saw Mary pause in front of Martina's cottage and stand for a moment outside the door. "I will wait for her here," she mused; "I do not suppose she will go inside."

Mary did mean to go inside, but she was prevented by the father of the sick boy. He was sober now, and his face was white with anger and distress, and he stood in the doorway and cried in a loud voice, loud enough to be heard by Luisa, while Juana's evil face peered from behind the window-shutter.

"Do not come near my child! You first bewitched him with your songs and music, and now you have brought this sickness upon him. You shall never see him again. Go!"

There is no telling what more he might have said if José had not appeared by Miss Summers' side, as if by magic. He caught her by the hand and led her a little farther on to the schoolhouse door, which she entered, speechless. He left her there without a word and hurried back to his cousin, who still stood threatening in his doorway. Luisa

did not wait to hear what José told the fellow, for she hurried on to Mary, but she was sure that she saw sparks flashing from José's eyes as she passed, and his lips were white and trembling.

It was good for Mary that she had work to do immediately, with little time to think. All that day at intervals, and for several succeeding days children were brought from El Porvenir and many outlying houses, as well as from the ranch itself, and before long most of the exposed had been vaccinated. José helped her the first day toward the last, and though he did not mention the affair of his cousin, there was a grimly satisfied look on his face that told Mary that she would not be troubled again.

As they were leaving the house just at dusk, and she stopped to lock the door, José said :

"You must not go to Martina's again, señorita. They are all against you there and they will not let you see Juan. The poor child knows no one now and you could do him no good. Will you promise me not to go?"

Mary would only promise that she would not enter the house unless she should be allowed to do something for the child, and she made José promise in his turn that he would try to induce them to let her at least send soft cloths and soothing washes for the poor little fellow.

When she laid her head on her pillow early that evening there was neither strength nor incli-

nation for any thought at all, and she lay in dreamless slumber through the long night.

There was no epidemic of small-pox in the ranch, though there were many sick children with swollen, aching arms.

Little Juan sickened and died so suddenly and all was so soon over, that the disease spread no farther than his desolate mother's cottage. During the few days of his illness his cry was for the *maestra;* sometimes he called her his "darling señorita," or his "beautiful angel," and even on the last day, when the eruption was deep and burning over his whole body, and he lay choked, and gasping, and half-delirious, his eyes glued fast with the noisome disease, he groped pitifully all about the bed and never lay quiet a moment in his efforts to get away and to her.

Mary's heart was wrung with grief at the accounts of the child's suffering and at her own helplessness. One day as she sat in the schoolroom, she suddenly gave way and broke down in an uncontrollable fit of sobbing as a little procession passed the door, bearing a small blue coffin; and all the children knew that Juan was dead and that the teacher had loved him as she had loved no other child. But they were not jealous, for they too had loved the gentle little fellow, and they mingled their sobs with hers.

Samuel, little Lola's cousin from El Porvenir, caught Mary's hand and knelt by her side to

comfort her. "Do not cry so, señorita," he said. "You could have made him well as you did our Lola, if they had let you. But now he is gone to live with Jesus, has he not? And he will not suffer any more."

Kissing her little comforter, she calmed herself and went on with the lessons.

And so little Juan's life ended, and he never grew to be a "great man"; but who can say that his life was too short or wasted?

That night, Captain Daniel galloped home from his uncle's house in La Providencia with the startling news that pretty Angela Vera had small-pox, and that the doctors had declared the disease epidemic in that town.

CHAPTER XII.

RAINY DAYS AT THE RANCH.

I ask thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise;
To meet the glad with joyful smiles
And to wipe the weeping eyes;
And a heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathize.

—*A. L. Waring.*

THE day after Captain Daniel's return to San Bernabé dawned gray and chill. Before eight o'clock a fine drizzle of rain was falling, and by noon it was pouring in steady torrents. A few children came to school, but at noon intermission their teacher told them not to return through the rain to the afternoon session, as there was no way to heat the room nor to dry their wet clothing. The next morning the steady downpour continued, and it was evident that it would be necessary to close school entirely during these first days of rain. The first winter rains in the north of Mexico often continue for two or three weeks, bringing a succession of dreary, dark days, to be followed at the end of the fortnight perhaps by a long season of bright, cold weather. Later on there may be another season of damp, gloomy days, with more or less

rain. The winter is a peculiarly trying time for the poor, who often wear their entire wardrobe at once, and have no dry clothing at home for a change.

The road through San Bernabé at this season was converted into a shallow creek during the hardest showers, and the ranch grew solitary enough out of doors. Here and there dripping figures plodded about, completely enveloped in thick red blankets, and with pantaloons rolled up above the knees, for the cattle must be comfortably housed and fed.

Inside the small, uncomfortable huts it was stifling and unhealthful, for when the wind beat the rain against their fronts the flap doors had to be lowered, and therefore little light and air entered the dim, close rooms. The meals had to be cooked inside also, and the smoke from the bad smelling *mesquite* wood was almost unbearable.

The days, however, were short, and there was little for the women to do but provide the simple meals for their families, while the babies swung in their shallow boxes beneath the blackened roofs, and the older children tumbled about the floor. The men dozed about the premises, or congregated in the thatched sheds near the great barn, where the cows lowed and the sheep bleated; and here they often found better accommodations than at home with their wives and children. In the better houses, whose roofs had been repaired, and whose

floors were paved and raised above the level of the ground, the rainy days passed snugly and swiftly, with knitting and mending the men's out-door farming garments, while entire families were sometimes employed in winding, by means of clumsy hand-turned wheels, large and small bobbins for the loom shuttles in the next town. Great hanks of scarlet and white and blue cotton were deftly thrown around the wheels, and men, women, and girls sat all day chattering or singing, in time with the busy whirr of the machines, and heaping baskets with the smoothly wound bobbins made of sections of a hollow reed. These were afterward sent by basketfuls to the town, where they were woven into *rebozos* in the immense hand-and-foot-looms still in use in all parts of Mexico.

In Don Eduardo's house all was in order for the winter. Benjamin built corn-cob houses and pens, seated upon the great brick *brazero.* Sometimes he was allowed to fan the fresh charcoal with the kitchen fan, and he would laugh with delight at the thousands of sparks from the crackling coal as the draught swept them up the yawning mouth of the great chimney overhead. Petra was the cook for the family, although several women were hired for the rougher work about the kitchen and house; but no one could make such sweet cakes as she, and her peppery, hot compounds of chopped meat, onions, and cheese, rolled up in *tortillas* and cooked in a sauce of red peppers and tomatoes,

were famed throughout the ranch. Raquel brooded over her knitting, or assisted at the grinding of the corn for the *tortillas*, while Eduardo dozed in a corner, after an invariable round every morning among his cattle. Mary laughed heartily the first morning as she watched the old man sally forth from the kitchen and cross the court toward the stables behind the house buildings. She called Refugio to her side, and both enjoyed the comical sight of the patriarch's rainy season costume. He came toward them as he saw them in the doorway, and there was a merry twinkle in his eyes as he greeted Mary, while the rain streamed down upon his blanketed shoulders from the broad-brimmed hat. Besides the umbrella-shaped hat and the blanket, he wore trousers made of heavy carpeting, which one would fancy completely impervious to the rain, and which were gay with red and green squares of color. These were turned up about the ankle, and upon the soles of his sandaled feet pieces of thick board were bound by leather straps, which raised his feet an inch or two above the ground. The bent, but still sturdy figure splashed by Mary's door every morning, and she always made a point of seeing him as he passed after that first day, for she liked to watch the brown, wrinkled face light into a pleasant smile at the sight of her, while his cheery greeting made her heart lighter and stronger for her day's work. This work now consisted of long-neglected sewing and

mending, of writing letters, and of teaching Refugio.

The heavy fall of the rain-beat upon the dirt roof overhead and the cosiness of her own dry quarters were very agreeable. Here the hours did not drag for her, and Refugio's contented face continually shone with peaceful happiness. The latter could now read well, and she never wearied of writing and of drawing. José had had a plain desk made for her, and it stood in the outer room, where she would sit by the open door for hours, for there was no window, trying to draw anything and everything which took her fancy in the court outside or in the room. She was also learning to sew very neatly under her teacher's instruction, and no one, watching the pretty, plump figure and flushed and interested face bending over her work, would have recognized in her the emaciated, half-dying creature who had fallen prostrate in that same doorway some months before.

José spent most of his spare time now in the schoolhouse with his music, and the wind often blew fragments of his chords and scales and even hymns, down the rain-beaten road to the ranch.

The excitement about the chapel had subsided for a time; although José and Petra knew better than Mary, or even Raquel, that this shut-in time gave ample opportunity for much discussion over the embers at night, and among the bobbin wheels all day.

The principal actors in the affair now discussed it no longer; they were awaiting the arrival of Mr. Richards. Raquel and Petra meanwhile had begun a quiet attendance upon church and Sunday-school, and there seemed little notice taken.

Captain Daniel spent his time between his mother's kitchen and the *sala* in José's home. The two young fellows had never been very cordial in their relations, as there was little in common between the young uncle and his nephew. Daniel amused himself with his accordion and the dogs, and spent his evenings in teasing Petra, who gave him a kind of indulgent, half-unwilling admiration. She was much older than he, and gave him a great deal of good advice as to the deportment of a young soldier in the capital.

Six days had passed since his return to San Bernabé, and no news had been heard of poor little Angela, stricken with small-pox in the infected town.

On the seventh morning after little Juan Vera's burial, Mary sat busily writing at her table in the bedroom. She was much interested in writing to her grandmother an account of her little favorite's life, as far as she had known it, and of his last days in school. She was ending with the lament that she had not been allowed to enter the now desolate home, where Martina sat mourning all of her dead boys, and "would not be comforted." She had written this much when, through her

open door, she saw Refugio in earnest conversation with some one at the outer door, and she laid aside her pen, not to take it up again for many long days and nights of anxiety. A messenger had come from La Providencia, telling of Angela's extreme danger, and imploring that the señorita would return with him to the poor girl's bedside.

José had brought the news to Miss Summers, and she soon heard what particulars the servant had been able to give. Angela had been ill for eight days, delirious and almost unmanageable. The disease seemed taking the worst form, and yet in the midst of her delirium she called continuously for the Señorita María, just as Juan had done. Her parents begged that she would come to save the life of their child, as the overworked physician had already declared the form of her disease incurable, and had left her to attend to the more hopeful cases in his charge.

Petra and Raquel joined the group in the anteroom before José finished his account, and both exclaimed in horror at the idea of the fearful journey that would be before her, and the danger of the epidemic.

"The servant says that there is not a house in the whole town without the disease, Mariquita, and you must not go. Besides, the road will be flooded, and the river! It will impossible to get along, for in some places the river bed is the only road. The servant was drenched and once nearly

drowned, he says. I asked him," continued Petra, "if it would be possible for you to go, and he only shrugged his shoulders and made no reply."

Mary looked at José, who remained silent while the women spoke, and stood flicking at his boots with a long switch which he carried in his hand.

"I *must* go," declared Mary, who thought she discovered no signs of discouragement in José's face, and surely he knew better than these women the dangers and possibilities of such a trip. "How can I refuse, Doña Raquel, when they have sent so far for me, and Angela needs me so much? Do not dissuade me, José," she exclaimed, as he opened his mouth to speak. "Only say that it will not be a reckless thing to do. I am well and so strong!"

"I was only going to say that our horses can be ready in half an hour," returned José, smiling into the eager face, "and we can set out immediately, without waiting for the servant, who says he rode all last night in the dark and ought to rest."

"You!" exclaimed Mary and Petra together. "Will you go too?"

"Certainly," he replied, quietly; "there is no one else to take the señorita. She could not go with the man alone. I know the road perfectly, and besides there is a short cut by which we can avoid the river road. It will be rough and a little

dangerous, but the señorita is brave and will not be afraid."

"No, indeed!" Mary declared, enthusiastically; "not with you! And as you say, there is no one else."

"Daniel," suggested Raquel. "But there," she continued, "there is no one who knows the way so well as our José, and with no one else should Mariquita go. Come, Petra, let us get some food ready. They cannot arrive before dark and must have dinner on the way."

"In half an hour, señorita," called José, as he stepped out into the rain. "It is already twelve o'clock, and we shall have to ride hard to reach the town before dark."

Half an hour later Mary stood at the door, clad in a suit of rubber waterproof, cloak, hood, leggings, and shoes. Refugio stood at her side with tearful eyes and quivering lips, and held a large package, also done up in rubber cloth. José was coming toward them, mounted on his splendid gray, and leading the black mare which Daniel had ridden to the picnic. Petra and Raquel came at the same moment from the kitchen, unheeding the rain in their frequent journeys back and forth across the court, and bearing cups of hot chocolate for the travelers.

"The dinner and supper too, perhaps," said Petra, "are in José's saddle-bags, señorita. You must eat well to keep out the cold. I do not think

anything will get wet, as we have wrapped it all carefully, and the saddle-bags close securely."

"Here, Antonio," called José to the stable-boy, "strap the señorita's bundle behind her saddle, and then hold the horses while I put her on Black Jane." He alighted as he spoke, and standing within the door took the cup of chocolate from his mother's hand.

"Do you think you can ride her, señorita?" he asked, while Mary was trying to swallow the hot drink and burning her tongue in the effort. "She is much stronger than little Blanquilla, but is easily managed with a firm hand on the bridle."

"Yes," replied Mary, a little doubtfully, as she eyed the big mare champing her bit and stamping her feet in the puddles of water. She was prevented from saying more by the arrival of Captain Daniel, dainty as usual, as he stepped carefully between the pools of water, carrying an umbrella over his head.

"It is a sin to take the señorita into that place, José," he growled; "for if she is not drowned on the way she will die of small-pox after she gets there."

"Either of which fates would be preferable to sitting here waiting for the rain to go by, and knowing that Angela wanted me," asserted Mary, with spirit. "And besides, I am not afraid. José says that there is little real danger for one who knows the road."

José did not answer Daniel, and the next moment, uncovering the saddle of Mary's horse, he turned and, lifting her, deposited her gently upon it. The good-byes were hastily said, and the two left the courtyard followed by the tears and good wishes of the three women, while Daniel's soul swelled with a baffled sense of mingled jealousy and hatred.

"If he brings her home as safe as I brought her out of the storm we may be thankful," he muttered, as he also turned out at the gates and watched them along the road.

Refugio was inconsolable at her loss, and the elder women gave her the good advice to lock up her señorita's rooms and to come and stay with them during her absence.

The day passed with no cessation of the rain, and the mountains were hidden by the low hanging clouds. The wind drove the rain in blinding sheets against the house, while here and there, in the snug kitchen and other rooms, drops filtered down through the roofs and made small pools on the floor.

Part of the afternoon was occupied by Petra and Refugio in securely covering Mary's books and furniture against the dampness, and when finally they lay down to sleep, it was with the ardent hope that José and Mary were as safely housed as they, in Don Ignacio Vera's house in La Providencia, more than thirty miles away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RIDE TO LA PROVIDENCIA.

Thus, man is made equal to every event. He can face danger for the right. A poor, tender, painful body, he can run into flame or bullets or pestilence with duty for his guide.—*Emerson.*

FOR many miles the road to La Providencia lay across the plain and there was nothing to relieve the monotony of the ride. The two travelers, followed at a short distance by José's servant, Antonio, galloped along, for the most part silently and yet not uncomfortably. Both were warmly dressed beneath their rubber outer garments, and though it rained steadily there was little wind and the air was fresh and invigorating. The prairie stretched unbroken by the least rise of ground to the foot of the hills bounding the plain on three sides. Here and there clumps of the thorny *mesquite*, or the rough, unsightly trunk of the Spanish dagger, with its head of thick, spiked leaves, broke the monotonous level. The tufted prairie grass lay weather-beaten and sodden from the rain, and not a prairie dog showed his curious little head above his burrow as the horses galloped by. Only the splashing of the rain and an occasional snort from the horses broke the silence of the vast, open space around them.

Soon after one o'clock the stunted pines fringing the hills in front took more definite shape, and the ground began to rise imperceptibly, until the horses slackened their pace and began to breathe more heavily. José then pointed to his companion a dark spot which at that distance looked like a large stone resting against a tree, but which was in reality a house, and calling Antonio, he bade him ride quickly on ahead and inform the people of the inn that travelers were coming.

"We shall soon find a fire and something hot to drink, señorita," he said, "and you may rest for an hour. There are women there who will look after you."

"And we shall eat Raquel's lunch with good appetites, I fancy," Mary replied, "for I am very hungry."

Still ascending the road, which was rough and rocky, they came after ten minutes more of riding to the rude, thatched house, and Mary was soon sitting on a stool beside a fire built in the center of the largest room, while the smoking horses were led to shelter and carefully tended by José and the servant.

Perhaps such a sight had never before dawned upon the three or four Mexican women as met their eyes when they gathered about their guest, helping her off with her wet things. And when she sat on the stool warming her feet by the fire, with her damp yellow hair loosened and rippling over

her shoulders, their delight was boundless. One stood at her side and felt of her dress, exclaiming loudly and describing to the others the softness of the texture of the flannel ; another hung the damp rubber coverings on a line and busied herself in wiping them dry with a cloth ; while a third knelt beside her and begged to be allowed to unbutton her shoes, so that she might warm her feet with more ease.

"She is like the picture of the virgin in the church at La Providencia," declared one woman. "Her red cheeks and blue eyes and hair of gold are exactly like the blessed mother's. Are you married, señorita?" she asked, looking curiously into Mary's face, glowing from the biting air of the mountains.

"No," Mary replied ; "I am not married."

"And where can you be going in this flood of rain?" asked another, "and with young José of San Bernabé!"

"We are going to see his cousin in La Providencia, who is very sick and has sent for me. I know something about sickness and medicine, and she is my friend, so I was glad to go, and José was the only one who could come with me. The servant who brought me the message from La Providencia lost his way last night and was nearly exhausted when he reached San Bernabé, so we left him behind."

"Well, the Veras know these mountains as well

as the wild things up here, and José particularly ; last year he was always passing here, hunting with his dogs, or going over to see his uncle's family in the town. He has not been over so often lately, as we were saying last night, my husband and I."

So they chattered on, while one returned to her *tortilla* making, and another to a pot of soup boiling over the coals, and Mary took a comb from her pocket and combed and braided her heavy hair into one long braid which would resist the wear and tear of hard riding better than the coil with which, in her haste, she had started out.

A smoking pile of *tortillas* was ready by the time José entered and they began a somewhat hurried lunch, as there seemed signs of an increase in the storm, and José was anxious to be off.

"You had better stay here till to-morrow morning," advised one of those who had drifted in one by one to have a look at the young foreigner with the white skin and "hair of gold." "It will be a wild night, and we are a good four hours' ride now from the town, even in good weather, and it will be dark in the pass before that."

"No," returned José, "our horses will make it in three hours more, for they are still fresh, and the short cut over the ledge will give us quite an hour's gain."

"Aha! That shows you have not been over this road since last winter, José *mío!*" said

one of the men. "Did you not know that the last storm in the spring finished up your short cut? And a bad job it has been for us too. Big boulders were washed away from the cliffs just below the first curve in the narrow path, you remember how it was? and the whole path and half the mountain-side went down with them."

"Indeed!" José replied, and an expression of doubt came into his face as he looked at Miss Summers, trim and neat again now, and contentedly munching toasted *tortillas* with her cheese. "Perhaps then, señorita," he suggested, in his broken English, which she perfectly understood, though the others did not, "you had better remain here to-night. They have a small room, bare and dirty enough, but it is sometimes used for travelers, and I will watch all night and see that all is safe. There may be danger in going on if we have to go by the lower river road."

"Let us go on, José," she replied. "Anything would be better than staying here." And she thought shudderingly of what might be her experiences during a night in the miserable little den at her disposal. It would not be possible to lie down to sleep in that house, and to spend the long winter night in the dark in utter wakefulness would be unbearable. A wild ride, even through the bitter cold and rain, seemed preferable and she was thoroughly warmed and refreshed now that lunch was over.

"If I was alone," proceeded José, thoughtfully, while the Mexicans stared with open mouths at the two conversing in the unknown tongue, "I should certainly keep on. For I know the road, as I have said. Are you sure that you are rested enough and that you can bear four or perhaps five hours more in the storm? For it is getting to be a storm now."

"Yes," replied Mary, eagerly, "I can bear anything, except to stay in this place all night. The horses can swim, and I too can swim," she added, "or climb, or do anything better than sit still."

"The señorita prefers to keep on, friends," said José, at length, in Spanish to the Mexicans. "My cousin is very ill, and she does not wish to lose a moment on the way. As I am her escort, I must do as she wishes, although I have advised her to stay here. And now," rising and taking his hat, "please help her on with her wraps, if they are quite dry, and we must start off again, as it will soon be dark. Are the candles dry, Antonio, and the lanterns all right?"

They went out together with the men, while Mary again arrayed herself in traveling attire. In a few moments the inn was left behind and the narrow defile, leading over the hill and down into a narrow valley beyond, was echoing to the hoof beats of the three horses. Their progress was slow here, as the ground was slippery and uncertain,

and Antonio was sent on ahead to explore the road in front.

The change was great from the open prairie to the wooded slopes of the defile, and they seemed to feel the rain less, although it grew bitterly cold. The valley which they were approaching was hardly more than a pass for the river between the mountains, with the road on one side. Here and there were curves of the river bed which gave patches of lowland in between the cliffs, and here corn and other grain were planted in their season. In the summer the tinkle of cow or sheep bells was heard along the banks of the river, or on the mountain-sides above, nearest the fords; but now, fords and lowland meadows alike were no more, as José more than suspected, and the water, though not yet deep, was rushing and very cold. The roaring of the stream could be heard at intervals, as they proceeded, and José began to talk, to prevent the tell-tale sound from reaching Mary's ears.

"Do you know, señorita, that an Englishman was killed several years ago in the house we just left? The people who lived there then have all died or gone away, except the old man you saw sitting in the shed outside. He is an idiot now, and they say that it was he who did the deed. But who knows?"

"Why, José, you wanted me to spend the night there."

"You would have been as safe there as in your own room in my father's house, señorita. Do you believe that I would have proposed such a thing to you if it had been unsafe? I believe they are honest people living there now, although they are rough and ignorant. And I told you that I would watch all night. But about the Englishman: He was going from S—— to La Providencia, where he expected to make an investment in cattle for stocking a ranch which he had lately bought, and the people in the inn must have known that he carried money about his person somewhere, for he had talked of his plans quite freely before retiring. His two servants went off to the shed to sleep, and when one of them went to call their master the next morning, he found him stabbed through the heart and his clothing torn to pieces, in what must have been a fearful struggle, for the Englishman was a giant."

"Were not the people of the house arrested?" Mary asked.

"In those days, and off here in the mountains, things were not done that way. No one heard of it for a long while, for the servants took themselves off when they found their master dead, perhaps fearing that the murder would be laid upon them. And the Englishman's horse went off with them. That is the tale that got about when inquiries began to be made about the missing man. Then the house back there was closed for

a long time, and no one knew where the people had gone. Finally, the old man reappeared. He was found alone in the house by a party of traveling Mexicans, who were camping near by, and as he was nearly starving, they fed him and gave him a blanket to sleep in. He would not let them leave him after that, and finally they decided that it would be a good thing to stay and re-open the inn, and there they have been ever since. The old man is cared for by them, and is harmless now, as you saw, with his shaking limbs and blindness."

"I could not have endured to spend the night there," Mary said, when José had finished his tale. "I suppose the poor man was murdered in that very room where you wanted me to sleep."

"Yes, I suppose so," replied José, calmly, "because it is a back room and farther from the road than the others. But you see I should have lain across your doorway outside, and my pistols are all right," he added, clapping his hand to his belt.

"Do not talk any more about such dreadful things, José," said Mary. "Only listen to the wind in the pines overhead; it is like music, it *is* music! How sweet the air is! I am glad to see pine trees again, although they are not tall and straight like ours at home. See, these look stunted, and are so crooked and thick. What is that roaring, José?" she asked, as her companion

remained silent and seemed straining his ears to listen.

"We are coming near the river now. It is about a mile from here, and the noise you hear is the water, swollen by the rain."

"A mile off, and the noise so distinct! The water must be high indeed."

"Are you afraid?" José asked, bending nearer to look at her face, for it was growing dark already.

"No, I am not afraid," she replied, bravely, "though it is getting a little dismal, I must confess. What a lonesome road this is! Does no one ever pass this way?"

"Certainly," he returned, glad to turn her thoughts in another direction. "If you had come along here earlier in the fall you would have passed droves of donkeys loaded with wood or charcoal; and ranchmen are constantly traveling along this road, as it is the direct communication between all the ranches on the plain behind us and La Providencia. You would not have lacked company then, but I do not know that you would have been any safer."

Antonio now came toward them out of the dusk, and reported the road ahead all right to the river bank.

"And farther on, does it seem to be under water?" José asked.

"As far as I could see, it was not," replied the

boy. "I only rode a short distance, and though the mud is deep, and there is much water, the river does not seem to be out of banks."

"Light the lanterns, now," ordered José, "and tie one on each side of your saddle and ride on, just in front of us. Do not go beyond hearing."

In the pause during the lighting of the candles in the lanterns, Mary looked at her watch and found that it was but five o'clock. She exclaimed at this discovery, and thought that the watch must have stopped, but found that it was ticking busily.

"It will be lighter," said José, "when we get out of this defile. The trees and the clouds together cause the darkness. Now, be careful as we descend here, for the road is very steep."

"Are we getting back to the level of the San Bernabé plain?" asked Mary, breathlessly, as the horses, with a slip down the last rocky slope, at last came out of the shadow and started toward the river.

"No," replied José; "did you not notice how much longer the ascent was than the descent? The river here is eight or nine hundred feet above the level of the plain, which it does not reach for fifty miles farther on. It is not much of a river, after all," he went on after a while, consolingly, as the roar increased and they came in sight of the water. "I have ridden here many a time when the bed was entirely dry, except a little

stream in the very center, where I would walk my horse to cool his feet. It is never deep, and only a misstep now of one of the horses could cause an accident. We do not enter the water at all if the road is dry, until we come to what is called the Devil's Gate, where for a quarter of a mile the pass is so narrow that there is no room for the road."

"The water will be deep there, then?" questioned Mary, quickly.

"Then we can swim," returned José, who had already been revolving this possible contingency in his mind.

Meantime the rain did not cease for a moment, and some had found an ingress beneath Mary's hood, so that she was growing damp and uncomfortable. The wind, also, was strong down the gulch, and the horses began to show signs of fatigue.

They plodded on, however, without mishap, guided after a while entirely by Antonio's lanterns, while even the rushing water a few feet away was invisible.

At six o'clock, the mountain sides began to close in on each side of the stream, and the cliffs loomed dark and forbidding ahead. José guided Mary's horse to the partial shelter of an overhanging rock, and putting a pistol into her hand, bade her wait there for a few moments with Antonio while he went forward to inspect the road.

He took one of the lanterns with him and urged his unwilling horse into the darkness.

After what seemed to Mary an hour of waiting, his lantern again flashed across the puddles in the road, and he rode up to the two under the rock, dripping with water, which could not be all rain.

"It does not matter," he declared, shrugging his shoulders at Mary's exclamation of dismay. "I am no wetter than I was before. But really I do not see how I can let you take that cold bath. It will not take the horses off their feet, however, if they do not step into any holes or stumble over the rocks in the water."

"What are you going to do?" she queried, as he dismounted and approached her. "See, poor Grisito looks ready to drop," as the gray horse hung his head and trembled.

"Yes, he is a little blown; but the worst will be over when we get into the road again. Devil's Gate is just ahead, and a mile beyond we shall see the lights of La Providencia. Now, I am going to shorten your stirrup, and tuck your skirts well up about the saddle. One foot will be wet whatever we do."

"Why did you leave me your pistol, José?" she asked, as he unbuckled and re-buckled the straps.

"Because I did not know how it would be on there ahead, and if I had not come back, you and Antonio would have had to ride back to the inn.

I thought it best for you to have the pistol; now, however, I will relieve you of it."

Mary silently took up the weary road again, wondering how it was possible that this simple countryman was possessed of such instinctive chivalry of manner and pure goodness of heart when his only education or culture had been that of the ranch school, followed by heterogeneous reading of such books as he could find between the city of S—— and La Providencia.

"It is not from books nor the sciences," she thought, "that one gets sweetness of nature and purity of life. His mother must have been a superior woman, and I believe that he was her only child. . Raquel is good and true, and Eduardo is honest and interesting, but they lack the gentle ways that are natural to José."

Here her horse set his foot in the river, following José and succeeded by Antonio.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE RIVER.

Why should'st thou fill to-day with sorrow
About to-morrow,
My heart?
One watches all with care most true,
Doubt not that he will give thee too
Thy part.

THEN it seemed to grow colder and darker. The horses bravely pushed on through the icy water which was not too deep to prevent them from keeping on their legs. Occasionally they stumbled upon the loose rocks in the bed of the stream, but they progressed for twenty minutes or more without much difficulty, although Mary felt her mare's labored breathing quiver through her whole body as she stretched her head out above the level of the water to keep mouth and nose from filling. Mary had long ago lost the sensation of wet and cold in her lower limbs, and was anxiously longing to put an end to their prolonged exposure.

José had just turned his head to shout above the noise of the water, "We are almost at the shore-road again," when "Black Jane" stumbled suddenly, fell upon her knees and then rolled over be-

neath the water. She had planted her fore feet in a hole, and was prevented by the current of the stream from regaining her footing. Antonio and José were on the spot in a moment, startled by the splash, and Antonio soon had the mare on her feet again, while José groped for Mary, who seemed lying at the bottom of the stream. The spirit had been so effectually wearied and chilled out of the poor animal that she had hardly struggled after the first vain effort to recover herself, and Mary's life was, perhaps, due to her passiveness. She had fallen from the saddle when "Black Jane" fell, as she had taken her foot from the stirrup to keep it out of the water, and her seat was necessarily insecure. In the few seconds before José could get to her, his heart seemed to stand still with terror, for he could not see that she made any effort to extricate herself, and when he lifted her from the water she was quite unconscious. Antonio led the horses to the shore, a few yards on ahead, while José waded through the water up to his armpits with Mary in his arms. He laid her down upon the side of the road under a gnarled old pine tree, which jutted out from the steep mountain side above, and sent Antonio forward to the first house, a half-mile ahead, where the town suburbs began. The boy was to have a bed prepared and to bring some one who should aid them in carrying Mary to the house. The hoof-beats had scarcely passed out of hearing, however, when partial consciousness re-

turned to Mary, and as if in a dream she heard above the roar of the water and the moaning of the wind in the trees, the sound of a voice in passionate prayer:

"God in heaven," pleaded the voice, "give back her life! Do not let it be that I have killed her; thou knowest if I have done wrong in loving her, but thou, Jesus, will pardon me, for thou knowest how sweet and tender she was. Oh, my God, I will promise to serve thee, and to——"

"José," said a feeble voice, and he was by her side in a moment.

"Señorita!" he exclaimed in an ecstasy; "*señorita mía, vida de me corazon!*"[1]

"I am very cold, José. Let us go somewhere to the fire—to a house."

"If I only had some spirits," he murmured, holding her cold hands and chafing them with his own colder ones.

"There, in my bag—a bottle!" she faltered.

He sprang to Black Jane's side, found the bag by the light of the lantern, and again was at Mary's side with the flask and poured a small quantity into the little cup fitted upon the flask.

After drinking some she sat up and looked around at the wild scene in dismay. The lantern showed José's dripping form and the drooping figures of the two horses standing quietly side by side near by. The narrow road was bordered on

[1] My señorita, life of my heart!

one side by the stream and on the other by the precipitous hillside, and she could see no sign of the lights of the town.

"If you think you can go on now, señorita, a quarter of an hour will bring us into La Providencia. But rest a moment, if you like, for see, it is scarcely raining at all now, and you are somewhat sheltered."

"Did you get me out of the water, José? I do not remember very well what happened."

"I thought you were dead," he answered, in a low voice, after explaining her fall and the rescue; "and señorita, if you had died, I should have died also."

"I think I must have fainted," she interrupted him. "Several times I felt dizzy when I saw the water rushing by. If it had not been for the faintness I should have been able to extricate myself and get up. And you did not leave me long enough in the water to drown."

"I cannot tell you what I felt, as I brought you here in my arms," he continued, not heeding her interruption. "I thought that if you were dead I should like to just keep on walking all my life through the dark with your head on my shoulder, and——"

"José, hush!" exclaimed Mary, sternly; "I cannot listen to such words. You must not tell me any more, for to-morrow you will be yourself again and will be sorry that you forgot yourself."

"Have I forgotten myself? Ah, yes, there is to-morrow, and we must think of to-morrow," bitterly.

"I can go on now," Mary said, very gently. And she arose hastily to her feet without seeing the hand he extended to assist her. José turned wearily away and brought the horses nearer, and soon Mary was in her seat again. As he turned from her to mount his own horse the rays from the lantern fastened to his saddle-bow fell upon his face and showed it so white and full of pain that Mary thought he must have been hurt in rescuing her or the horse from the water.

"José," she exclaimed, "what is the matter? Are you hurt? You did not tell me!"

"Hurt? Yes; but not as you mean, señorita. Will you pardon me for what I said? If—if it had not happened, if you had not fallen, you would never have known. You will forget that I ever spoke so to you, will you not, señorita?" He was standing with one hand upon the pommel of his saddle and his eyes cast down before her pitying look.

"Yes, I shall forget, and so will you, José. You were frightened and did not know what you were saying. We will say and think no more about it."

"You will think no more about it," José whispered to himself, as they rode drearily on. "But as for me, my dear señorita, you know nothing about it."

All this had occupied very little time, counted by seconds, however much of life was lived in those few moments by one of the party. So after riding along wearily enough for a quarter of an hour, they found Antonio trying in vain to induce the men of the nearest house to set out to the relief of the unfortunate travelers.

"It is only a trap," the men had declared, "and we will not be deceived by your tales. To be knocked in the head and our house robbed by half a dozen brigands would be a fitting job for a night like this, but we decline to be sharers in it."

"Why did you not bring the young lady on your horse?" a woman had demanded.

"She is drowned, I tell you, and my master will not have her swung like a dead sheep over the pommel of the saddle."

José's arrival put an end to this discussion, and all then rode on, to an accompaniment of surprised exclamations from the dwellers in the cottage.

The travelers were clattering up the steep paved street leading into the town when the church clock struck seven. Here and there a feeble lamplight flickered at the corners, but most of the houses showed dark front windows. Just when it seemed to Mary that she could not bear one step more, José stopped in front of a wide door, and before alighting, leaned down and lifted the brass knocker and let it fall gently.

"Here we are at my aunt's house, señorita." He spoke to her for the first time. "Now you will rest."

The doors were opened and a servant woman appeared. Mary was landed, wet, tired, and miserable in the paved hallway, and while the servant went in search of her mistress, Angela's mother, Mary had time to realize that she was in a house of some wealth and comfort. José led her to a seat in the corridor, as she was too wet to enter the *sala*, and a hanging lamp showed the inner court full of flowers, while a little fountain played in the midst.

Then motherly arms embraced her and a rosy-cheeked woman stood before her, whom José greeted as his aunt.

"You have come," she cried, joyfully, then lowered her voice; "it seems a miracle. How was it possible?"

"The señorita is half-dead with cold and hunger," interrupted José. "Tell us how Angelita is, and then the Señorita María must go to her room. She ought not to see Angela to-night."

"My Angelita is just the same as she was last night when I sent the man off to you. I fear she cannot live, my beautiful little angel. You would not know her, José, with all her beauty gone. No, the señorita need not see her to-night, and she will not know that she is here. Poor little one," she added, taking Mary's limp hand in her own

fat, warm one. "Come, let me put you to bed, and you shall have something hot to eat and drink."

"And Angela?" Mary asked faintly, for she was almost exhausted; "I came to nurse her. She will want you."

"Her papa is with her, and besides she knows no one. To-morrow you shall see her; you could not bear it now. She is all changed now, and I cannot believe that she is my pretty child."

Mary suffered herself to be led off to her room, and to be cared for by the motherly hands that were happy in giving relief to her who was suffering thus for her daughter's sake. Thoroughly warmed and fed, she soon lay wrapped in a flannel dressing-gown, to be ready if there should be need of her during the night, and Doña Isabel stole from the room hoping that she would sleep.

The coals in the brazier, which had been brought into the room to take a little of the chill from the air, glowed redly, and from the soft light diffused about her Mary saw all the details of the clean, little apartment. White curtains hung at the window and the single brass bedstead was draped with white hangings. Two or three chairs, a little washstand, and a table completed the furniture. Opposite the foot of the bed hung a soft engraving of the Madonna and Child; and before this swung the tiny light of a taper held in a quaintly shaped little vessel of crystal. In every

room in the house there were just such little lights burning before the pictures of the virgin, who was expected to be propitiated by this attention and perhaps to save the sick girl's life.

Mary sighed as she turned her face away from the little point of light, and it was long before her aching limbs and troubled thoughts would let her sleep.

"Life is difficult!" she murmured, to herself. "Why must I cause distress and trouble to poor José, when I only wish to help him! Then, there is Angela. She will probably die, and if I am in the house they will all say it is my fault." And she turned restlessly on her pillow. "Anyhow, I am glad I came. I shall make the mother my friend, and perhaps Angela will live. Poor little Juan! Poor Martina!" she sighed, as her thoughts strayed back to San Bernabé and her work there.

Martina's lonely fate was rarely out of her mind, and she could hardly wait for the woman's resentment, stirred up by old Juana's lies, to die away before seeking her again and cultivating the friendship of the now desolate mother.

She fell asleep amid her plans, and the virgin mother smiled sadly down all night upon the little light illuminating her face. The charcoal burned to ashes and the rain pattered fitfully upon the roof, but the young missionary did not wake until morning.

CHAPTER XV.

NURSING SMALL-POX.

A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee shall make thee rich;
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong;
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest.

—*E. B. Browning.*

ANGELA VERA had been ill for eight or nine days when Miss Summers reached La Providencia, and the disease was then at its height. A more revolting sight could hardly be imagined than met her eyes when she entered the sick room on the morning after her arrival. The figure on the bed bore not the slightest resemblance to the bright, laughing girl who had danced with Captain Daniel only two weeks before. The poor face was terribly swollen and completely covered with the sores, which had taken the confluent form, and the whole surface was a solid abscess. It was the same with the hands, which were twice their natural size, and lay helpless and discolored upon the bed-cover. The sparkling black eyes were closed, sealed fast by the swollen lids, and the lips were blackened and parched with fever.

A miserable moaning greeted Mary's ears as she hurried to the bedside, undaunted by the sickening sight before her. Angela seemed to recognize her voice, as the delirium had decreased during the night; but the two large tears which issued from the veiled eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks were the only signs of recognition that she could give at first. Her friend sat beside her during the long hours of the morning, while the parents declared that Angela had not been so quiet for several days, and the hoarse voice ceased its plaintive cry for the Señorita María. Once during the morning the swollen lips parted and painfully uttered a word or two.

"*María, agua! Ay de mi!*"[1] she sighed.

With the greatest difficulty she was able to swallow a few spoonfuls of water, to which Mary added a little stimulant, as her pulse was very feeble. So the day passed; there was not much to do, except to give light nourishment at intervals and moisten the fevered lips and tongue with cold water, which the sick girl took greedily.

Though the day was cloudy and dark, Mary closed the shutters inside, leaving only enough light to enable the watchers to move about the room; for she could not endure the thought of the pretty face being spoiled by the dreadful scars so often seen on the faces of the Mexicans who have had small-pox, and she hoped to avoid this

[1] "Mary, water! Woe is me!"

by protecting her from the light. Angela was quiet only when Mary was at her side, and after a while the father and mother stole away to take a much-needed rest.

Toward dark, Angela's restlessness grew very great; the fever was high, and she moaned continually with pain. Mary's voice failed to soothe her, and at length sharp, short cries of pain burst from her lips as she moved head, hands, and feet in her agony.

"This day and to-morrow are the worst days, Doña Isabel," said Mary; "after that she will begin to feel better. I shall try to relieve it as I have done in the hospital at home, although I fear that her restlessness will not bear it."

They were sitting, one on each side of the little bed, where the wreck of so much perfect health and beauty lay, and the mother gladly urged that Mary would do what she thought best.

"I put her into your hands, señorita; you know better than we. The doctor said last night that she would not live through the day."

"Hush!" whispered Mary, warningly, as the patient made a harsh sound in her throat, and tried to speak. "I have seen people get well who were much worse than Angela. Be patient, little girl," she said, tenderly, close to her ear. "After a day or two more you will be better, I am sure."

Then she prepared a quantity of soft lint soaked

in cold water, mixed with a little bi-chloride antiseptic solution, and laid this gently over the burning hands and feet and head. The constant wetting and renewing of the lint kept both nurses busy all night, but they had the satisfaction of seeing most of the restlessness disappear toward daybreak from the relief given by the applications. The next three or four days there was a constant struggle to alleviate the pain.

Doña Isabel and her husband, Don Ignacio, watched in amazement the soft, white hands of the nurse as they made her patient comfortable, and they marveled at the gentle firmness that insisted on obedience where the indulgence of a whim of the invalid would have wrought disastrous results. Mary's face grew pale and thin with this constant nursing, and when, about ten days after she first entered the sick room, she felt that she might leave her patient for an hour with Doña Isabel, her limbs almost refused to carry her across the little garden in front of the house. Angela's fever was not gone, but it was subsiding by degrees. Her piteous little mouth had learned to smile again, and as her eyes opened feebly she could once more see her mother's face, and watch her nurse as she went noiselessly about the room. So there was no reason now why Mary should not leave her for a while and go out in the fresh, rain-washed streets for a breath of air.

In the sunny plaza there was no hint of the

cruel plague abroad in the town, only perhaps there were fewer children than there would have been in its absence. The sun was shining for the first time since the beginning of the rainy season, nearly two weeks before, and the glossy leaves of the orange trees glistened in the sunlight. It was too cold to be still, and Mary wrapped her shawl more closely about her as she crossed the plaza, and walked toward the church on the other side. She had thrown a black shawl, Mexican fashion, over her head and shoulders, and thus passed unnoticed through the midst of strolling workmen and the shawled women in the plaza. She thought she saw José seated under a tree across the garden, but he did not look up. He had remained in La Providencia, hovering about the house and the door of the sick-room, but he had not been allowed to enter.

Mary had scarcely spoken to him, for all her thoughts had been occupied with her nursing, but several times she had seen his pale, sad face haunting the court or corridor.

He was watching her now from beneath the broad brim of his hat, as he sat muffled in a voluminous cloak, although Mary did not know it.

When he saw her enter the great doors of the church of San Antonio, he rose and followed her, and stood with other men about the entrance to the nave, where vespers were going on. He wondered a little at seeing her enter the church, then

remembered that there was a fine painting, ascribed to Murillo, in one of the chapels, which all foreigners were eager to see.

The truth was that his friend was not thinking of paintings, nor of Murillo, just then. An instinct to escape from the crowded plaza and street had led her toward the church, and she imagined that by passing through the nave she would be able to find a side door which would lead her out upon the back street, where she might take a quiet walk, unjostled by the throng abroad at this hour in the plaza and about the church. It was as she had thought. A side door opened into a small paved court shadowed by the great buttresses of the outer walls of the building, and a little iron gate opened upon a narrow street, where only a few children were at play, and an old woman or two basked in the sun. This was what she wished to find, and as she regained strength with exercise, she walked happily along, enjoying for a while the freedom from the sick-room. She could not long be content away from her charge, however, and an hour had not passed before she stood again at Angela's side, looking down upon the refreshing sleep of the patient.

"She will get well now, Doña Isabel," she whispered; "only let her sleep like that as much as she can. Her bath refreshed her and made her drowsy. She must have one every day now."

"Ah, señorita, we do not know how to bless

you for what you have done. Words of thanks do not seem to touch it at all. Angela will help us to thank you when she is well again. But do you think she will have lost all her beauty? Will the scars be like those of poor Alicia, next door?"

"I hope that Angela will not be badly scarred, Doña Isabel. A good deal depends upon keeping the room dark, and wet cloths upon the face. In a few days now the fever will be gone. Then she must sit up and take more nourishment to regain her strength. I tell you this now, because it may be necessary for me to return to San Bernabé while this better weather lasts. I must speak to José about it to-night."

Meanwhile, José waited at the church door in vain for Mary to reappear, and he had just concluded that she had left the church by a side door and was about to descend the steps and return to the house, when he saw approaching the familiar figure of Don Gregorio, the San Bernabé schoolteacher. He was not alone, for a priest was walking by his side and both were talking earnestly. José remained standing in his place when he saw that the men were approaching the church door, but he drew his hat farther over his well-known features and muffled his cloak closer about the lower part of his face. Both men were as well known to him as was his own father, for Don Gregorio had taught him to read long years ago,

and the priest was no other than Father Esteban Lopez, the young confessor of San Bernabé.

As they mounted the steps and passed José, he heard words that made him start and listen and then follow them as they entered the church. All three bared their heads as they went inside, but only the schoolmaster and the priest knelt and crossed themselves. José remained standing in the dim corner beside the side altar before which the others had prostrated themselves, holding his hat in his hand, and with the lower part of his face still muffled in his cloak. He stood so near that he could follow the conversation still carried on between the two, apparently devoutly occupied with their prayers. A beautiful life-sized figure in wax of Saint Joseph presided over the altar before which the three men had paused, and the mild, pink face gazed down innocently upon the kneeling figures below. On one pink hand, raised in the act of blessing, a splendid diamond ring glittered and the gold thread in the magnificent robe draped over the figure, gleamed in the light of the wax candles burning on the altar.

José stood as if attentively examining the figure of the saint with his face turned away from the men, but his ears were wide open to what they were saying and his face grew pale and his blue eyes flashed with anger as the half-whispered words continued. After a little a fat market woman fell upon her knees by the side of the

padre and brought an untimely end to the conversation of the two friends. Father Esteban touched his companion's sleeve, and both arose hastily as if caught in some act less innocent than repeating a few *paternosters* or half a dozen *ave Marías* before the waxen figure.

José did not follow them as they walked hurriedly up the nave and disappeared in the side chapel of the virgin, at the right of the high altar. He had heard enough to make it all important not to run any risk of recognition by the others, and he was glad to leave the oppressive, incense-laden air of the church and find his way out into the street amid the thronging masses of people who were now entering the church by the main door. He hurried across the plaza toward his uncle's house, and when he stood within the tiled corridor extending around the square inner court, he sent a servant to call Miss Summers, as he had something of importance to say to her. She was still sitting with Doña Isabel, a little removed from the bedside of the sleeping girl, and when she received José's message she immediately arose and went out into the corridor.

"Sit down a little moment, señorita," José began, as she stood before him waiting for what he had to say to her. "I shall not keep you long."

Mary was shocked to see the change that had come over his face since the morning when they

had set out from San Bernabé, so sad and white it had grown, and there were dark circles about the eyes, which hardly looked into her own now. She sat down on one of the iron benches near the little splashing fountain and waited for him to continue.

"I thought perhaps you might have some message to send by me to San Bernabé," he went on, "or that there might be something you need from there. As the diligence is running again now, and will return here the day after to-morrow, Refugio can send you anything you may wish. I shall have to return to the ranch, and as I leave before sunrise to-morrow, I thought it best to give you time to write anything you may need to say to Petra or Refugio."

"But José, can you not stay only two or three days longer and let me return with you? Angela will be well enough then for me to leave, and I am anxious to get back to San Bernabé."

"I am sorry, señorita, but I really must go to-morrow morning. I ought to have gone a week ago. I was not needed here, I know very well, but——"

"I know," interrupted Mary, as he hesitated, "Angela was so ill and you wished to be here if she died. It was very natural, I am sure. I suppose, however, that if you must go, there is no reason why I should not go home in the diligence in a day or two. You say that it will be here the

day after to-morrow, then in two more days it will return to San Bernabé, is it not so?"

"Yes," José replied, "and I suppose there is no reason, as you say, why you should not return in that way. It will be a rough trip, much worse than on horseback, but you will be perfectly safe and it will be all by daylight, except the first hour or two. If you decide to take the diligence then, Antonio can return with me, riding Black Jane and leading his own horse, as Jane will not be led."

"Well, that will be best after all," said Mary, relieved, for she had dreaded the long *tête-à-tête* ride with José, from whom, however, she knew she had nothing to fear, beyond a severe constraint of manner. "In four days Angela will be able to sit up a little, and will need me no longer. What is calling you home so suddenly, José?" she asked, as he seemed to be thinking deeply. "Have you had news from the ranch?"

"No," he answered, and then looked quickly at her, as if he meant to say something further. He must have thought better of it, however, for he closed his lips firmly and half turned away.

"I shall be glad to send a note by you to Cuca," Mary said, as she turned to leave him; "and I will have it ready by bedtime. I must go to Angela now, as she will be waking soon."

"Wait one moment, señorita," José spoke with an effort; "I just wanted to say that La Providen-

cia is not just like our ranch, and that you—I—I mean to say that you ought not to go about alone here. I wish you would promise not to go out at all while you remain here, unless Doña Isabel goes with you. I would rather you did not go out at all. "Believe me," he added, earnestly, "there is reason for this, although it looks like interference on my part."

"Why, José, how can you be so foolish? There can be no harm in my running out for a breath of air every day, now that Angela is so much better. But if Doña Isabella must go out with me, it would not be possible, as one must stay with Angela."

"You know our custom, señorita," he persisted; but he could not look into her eyes now, knowing that he was not perfectly frank, and yet unwilling to explain the real motive of his request.

"Yes, I know that in a city it would not be proper for me to go roaming alone through the streets, but here in this little mountain town it is very different, and it is not like you, José, to be foolish. I shall do nothing improper, you may be very sure, but I cannot give up my walks out of doors whenever there is opportunity for them. I am like a caged bird, and would die indoors with all this bright sunshine outside."

"For four days only?" he insisted, much to Mary's surprise, for such behavior was unlike José.

"No, indeed," she cried, impatient at last; "what can possibly harm me? The days are past when one is 'given' with a stiletto in broad daylight on the street, and besides, no one knows me here."

"The whole town knows you," he replied; "every one knows that the Protestant teacher from San Bernabé is here, and that she is nursing Don Ignacio's daughter, Angela."

"I am sure there is no harm in that," she retorted. "José, what do you mean? I am sure you are thinking more than you say."

"One must not always say all one thinks," he replied, oracularly; "of course, you will do as you think best in the matter, and I am not afraid of any personal injury to yourself; if there were danger of that kind, do you think I would leave you here alone? Unpleasant things may be said to you, that is all; and as you are a stranger in the town your walks may not be well chosen. Forgive me," he added, "for my interference."

Mary went wonderingly away, but she did not feel inclined to relinquish her liberty in the matter of walks about the town.

When she handed her note for Refugio to José that night, she gave him her hand in farewell, and sent messages of love to Raquel and Petra.

"See, Martina, if you can," she begged, "and let her know that I think of her every day."

"Before you go, señorita," José said, with a

tremor in his voice, "I want to ask if you have quite forgiven me for all that happened—for what I said to you the night we came here. You said you would forget it; but my memory is better than yours, and I cannot rest until I know that all is forgiven. I have felt a perfect wretch since then for taking the liberty to speak as I did, and I cannot forgive myself."

José's words had really been very few on the occasion to which he referred, but he knew, and she knew, the full meaning of what he had said, and she had not been able to put out of her mind the agonized accents of the prayer she had overheard when he fancied her dying or dead. Without pretending to misunderstand him, therefore, she looked kindly into his face and replied:

"We all make mistakes sometimes, José, and life seems very difficult at times. I have no right to judge you for your mistakes, which I am sure you are willing to correct as soon as you are able. I do forgive with all my heart all that needs forgiveness in your words to me then, and I am sure that you will forget them some day, and that we shall be good friends again. We are friends now, are we not?"

He could not reply, but he bent over the hand she offered him again and kissed it. Then he hurried away to his own room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRIEST AND THE SCHOOLMASTER.

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.—Deut. 33 : 27.

SEÑOR GREGORIO NUÑEZ, the boys' schoolmaster in San Bernabé, had been educated at the Jesuit College of San Juan, in S——. If in nothing else he had done credit to his black-robed teachers in that college, his stolid zeal for the welfare of his religion had proved his early connection with that hot-bed of Roman Catholic instruction. Since the bright winter afternoons of his youth, when the whole school, in double file, would be taken to walk under the grand old trees in the park, until his latter years, spent for the most part in the ranch schoolroom, he had hated foreigners, and Americans especially, with a hatred which strengthened with his years. As a young man, when the despised missionaries' teaching was yet new in S——, there was no student so zealous as he in throwing stones against the windows of the little Protestant mission room, nor in spitting upon the doors, and even the persons, of the white-faced foreigners. As a mature man, he had assisted at many a tumult about the

doors of the chapel where the pitifully small band of worshipers gathered every week with their heroic leaders; and his had often been the voice to instigate the prolonged hiss or contemptuous cursing in the market-place, directed against the well-known person of some Protestant passing by. Now, in his lonely life, which he was spending in the ranch where he was born, his enmity took a more secret, but not less bitter, form. His family was all gone, for the bones of wife and child lay in a back corner of the Campo Santo, in S——.

In these days, the schoolmaster was putting forth his best strength upon training the boys committed to his care in all the sacred teachings of the church, and however slow the progress made in spelling or in writing, the catechism and the legends of the saints were most faithfully taught.

He had been well satisfied with the slow progress of Protestantism in San Bernabé in the first years after the formation of the mission church there, and he had been Jesuit enough not to make any marked opposition to the sowing of seed which he was sure must soon die a natural death in an atmosphere and soil so entirely foreign to its nature. Still, he kept his eyes wide open to all the doings of the little band of Baptists, and never omitted a secret opportunity of casting a slight upon one of its humble members; yet he was wily enough to keep within the good graces of Eduardo

Vera, upon whom depended his position as schoolmaster.

When Miss Summers came to live in San Bernabé his eyes opened a little wider and grew a little more observant, for he soon foresaw what might be her influence with the women of the community. The correctness of this prognostication was not long in being confirmed, for, as has been said, the congregations in the mission house had increased, the Sunday-school had been formed and was flourishing, and the missionary's name was on the tongue of many mothers and daughters, even among those who were professed Romanists, as often as that of the virgin or the saints. He was closely studying the religious temperature of the community, and had already come to the conclusion that it was needful for Padre Esteban to hasten his footsteps in the direction of San Bernabé, when the news spread through the ranch that the chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary by the Señora Vera was not to be completed.

Naturally this information did not diminish his suspicions of the young teacher's influence in the family of Vera, and while his boys were incited to louder vociferation in the schoolroom opposite the mission house, his thoughts were busily at work and his plans forming, during little Juan's illness and the days of storm following. His school children were made very happy one morning, when Mary had already been in La Providencia

more than a week, by the announcement that their teacher would give them a few days' holiday, as he needed to go to La Providencia on business.

The old mule which had served his master for many years on the Sunday journeys to and from mass in La Bienvenida, was brought out of his stall that same morning, and by night Don Gregorio was safely housed in the house of his young friend, the Padre Esteban.

Although the priest had easily perceived that unusual business must have brought the man so far in such stormy weather, he would not let his visitor open his heart to him until he had supped. Later, while both men sat by the dismantled table, smoking one cigarette after another, the schoolmaster told his tale.

Father Esteban listened from beginning to end, without once interrupting his visitor in his recital. It was not the first time that news had come to him of the work of the foreign lady in San Bernabé ; had he not imposed a whole day's fast, with fifty *aves*, morning and night for a week, upon pretty little Angela Vera, when she had confessed to him her attendance at the mission service? He smiled now behind his plump hand as he remembered the pretty curl of her lips, and then his face grew grave again as he recollected the danger in which her bright young life had lain since. He forced attention to Don Gregorio's last words:

"One of two things must and will happen. Either this thing called Protestantism must be stamped out, once and for all, in San Bernabé, and that right soon, or all the men, women, and children will go over to this American religion."

"All?" exclaimed the priest, in mocking surprise. "Do you mean to say that you will not long be able to resist the charms of this young lady? You said she was young, I believe."

"For shame, Esteban, to speak thus to me, who am as firm a son of the church as there is in the whole republic. I know your love of jesting, sir, for I have long known you; but this levity now proves that you do not understand just how great has been the change in the ranch since you left last year."

"Forgive me, my friend," returned the priest, quickly, and hastening to erase the impression his words had given; "and I think I understand, perhaps even better than you, the danger of the influence of such a person as this señorita. She will turn the heads at least, of the women, as well as the men, with her dainty ways and pretty speech, and their hearts will not be slow to follow. As you say, there must be a stop put to it; but we will not be hasty; you must leave me to think it out for a while. Now you are fatigued with your journey and must go to rest. In the morning I shall tell you my conclusions." Both arose at these words, and the priest opened the door

of a small room next to the one they were occupying.

"Here, my friend," he continued, "this is your room. May you sleep well, and dreams of peace be with you."

Father Esteban sat long in deep thought after ushering his visitor into the bed-chamber, and his brow was still somewhat perplexed when he extinguished the light and lay down upon his own bed two hours later; his thin lips, however, were firmly compressed, and his cheek a little paler than usual, as he settled his head upon his pillow for sleep. There was more talk the next day between the priest and his guest, and at five o'clock in the afternoon, on the day when Mary Summers took her first walk abroad in La Providencia, both went to the church of San Antonio, where the priest was to confer with one or two higher dignitaries upon the situation at San Bernabé and to receive their sanction to his plans. As they were ascending the steps of the entrance neither noticed José, as he was only one among a score of other young men standing there, and they continued their low-toned conversation as they passed into the church.

"As the señorita *Americana* is here, and as she is intending to remain some time," the priest was saying, "it will be best for me to return with you to-morrow to San Bernabé. I know our people, and you know them also. If things have not gone

too far, already——." Here, in entering the church, they were separated from José for an instant by a party leaving the building, and when he next caught their whispered words they were already kneeling before the altar. "If I had only known that the lady was here all this time," Padre Esteban murmured, "I would have had a whole week at the ranch free from her presence and that of José. Where can the fellow have kept himself all this time, that I have not seen him?"

"Where the rest of the world kept itself during the tempest; where the Padre Esteban must have kept himself, evidently," replied Gregorio, grimly, "safe and dry in the house."

"Ah, yes," replied the other. "What a clear head you have, *maestro;* but joking aside, now that the weather has cleared, José will be getting back to the ranch. You say that old Ignacio's servant thinks that the lady will remain until the girl Angela is well again?"

"Yes; so she told me this morning when I met her in the market."

"Very good. Then we set out to-morrow at five in the morning, and by early afternoon we shall be at the ranch. You will go on quietly to your own house, for we shall not enter the ranch together, as I shall make a detour around by El Porvenir, and no one will know that you have seen me and made any report of the chapel affair. I shall arrive a little later, and as usual shall go to

old Vera's house. By bedtime I shall have a fair idea of the state of things in that household, you may be sure, and on the next day I shall act accordingly. I tell you this now, because it will be best for us to be no longer seen together in town, as José may get an inkling of our plan and return to San Bernabé."

"Thanks for the suggestion," muttered José, behind his cloak. "By the time you are passing Devil's Gate to-morrow morning, I shall be galloping over the prairie, and when you walk into my father's house in the 'early afternoon,' you will find me ready to receive you."

Here the conversation was interrupted by another suppliant at the altar, and José left the church.

"You will still find those who are faithful, Esteban, and your welcome will be warm in other houses if not in that of Eduardo Vera. Old Juana hates the young *maestra*, and the young lady knows it, for she has been frightened several times by the old woman's threats." Both were walking now up the nave.

"Threats!" exclaimed the priest, severely; "what right has Juana to threaten, and what has she been threatening?"

"Only out of her own crazy imaginings; you know she pretends to be a prophetess, and Doña Rosa urges her on. They both abhor the new doctrine!"

"New!" sighed the priest, piously. "Oh, that it were new, or that it had been strangled in its birth! Do you know, Don Gregorio, how these false teachings are spreading all over the republic? The cursed Protestants are building churches now in the cities, being no longer content with chapels of *adobe*, and hundreds attend the services where mere handfuls dared go in your youth. Their colleges for girls, as well as those for boys, are better than anything we have, and accomplished teachers are brought over from the States to direct them. Ah, my friend, when you were young and strong, and this Protestant hydra was young and weak, why did you not grasp its throat and choke it to death?" asked the younger man, half playfully.

Ah, Esteban *mío*," retorted the schoolmaster, "if men had been so zealous in my younger days as they are now, as you are, there might have been hope of such a thing! But," he continued sternly, "of what avail this chaffing? You are as much in earnest as I am, yet you will have your jest. Come, now, you are young, and the hydra, as you call it, is yet young and feeble in San Bernabé. Esteban, I lay it upon you to stamp it out of existence, to crush it forever, do you hear? As yet those who are undecided are only bewitched by Miss Summers' beauty and her eloquence, while those who have already joined the Baptists, although firm enough, I confess, are

but few, not more than forty, I should think. You will go to the ranch to-morrow, and by noon the next day the old walls of the chapel will be demolished, and new ones begun. You will remain there till the roof is on, if necessary, and before another spring we shall celebrate mass in our own chapel of Our Lady of Solitude!"

They were standing in a small side chapel devoted to this very lady, and the man's face was flushed with enthusiasm and his voice trembled with emotion.

"Stamp it out! Crush it to *death!*" he continued, muttering to himself, and his voice was the voice of a fanatic.

The priest was pale and his dark eyes also flashed.

"We will separate, *maestro*," he said, extending his hand to the teacher. "I have arranged for you at the hotel where they will give you a good room. At five to-morrow morning I shall join you at the door. It will still be dark and no one will see us as we ride through the street. Once out of town, José will hear nothing of us and will probably remain here."

They parted, and the priest went farther into one of the inner, secret rooms to confer with those who had been awaiting him there several moments, while Don Gregorio Nuñez prostrated himself before the Lady of Solitude.

And San Bernabé, the unconscious magnet of

four fast-beating hearts, lay quietly resting on the bosom of the great plain, shadowed by the purple mountains. As this first sunshiny day after two weeks of rain came to an end, and the sun sank below the horizon, Raquel was sitting just outside the kitchen door, while within Petra was preparing for supper.

"Petra," said the step-mother, gently, "I wish our Mariquita would come home."

"Why, mother?" asked the younger woman, coming to the door with a handful of the soft meal-dough in her hand. "I think she must enjoy being in the town, now that Angela is better. We heard last night, you know, that she is doing well."

"I am not thinking so much of María just now as of ourselves. For several nights the old, terrible dream has returned, and I have waked feeling as I used to do when we had loaned our picture of the Holy Family to some dying person in the ranch,—as if, with the saints gone, we were not quite safe from harm. With Mariquita so far away, I have a feeling of dread that I cannot understand, especially when I wake in the night."

"Mariquita herself would tell you that that is all foolish superstition, mamma," returned Petra. "However," she sighed, "I too shall be glad enough to have her at home again. And so will Refugio, I know," she continued, glancing at the gateway, where the girl stood gazing up the road

as if watching for some one. "The child is growing thin and seems to have forgotten how to laugh since the señorita went away. But, after all, mamma dear, there is no harm that can befall us if we trust in God, and he is still with us as well as with Mariquita in La Providencia."

CHAPTER XVII.

JOSÉ MAKES A DECISION.

Slowly and steadily, to and fro,
  Swings our life in its weary way;
Now at its ebb, and now at its flow,
  And "the evening and the morning make the day."

Sorrow and happiness, peace and strife,
  Fear and rejoicing its moments know,
Yet from the discords of such a life
  Can the clear music of heaven flow.

WHEN José left his uncle's home the next morning the clock in the church tower had just struck two, and the house was still and dark. He had taken leave of the family the night before, and saw no one as he went away but the old servant, Filipa, who had risen to lock the door after him.

His heart was sore and heavy as he rode down the street to join his boy Antonio at the inn, where the other horses had been stabled. Antonio had been glad to find there a ranchman passing through the country on foot on his way to S——, who was willing to ride the free horse as far as San Bernabé, and José's consent having been obtained, the three men, shivering in their blankets, were soon

clattering down the steep paved way leading from the inn out upon the road to the river.

The morning air was very chill, and a heavy mist hung over the river, enveloping the riders in its wet folds and penetrating through their heavy coverings.

José rode before his companions and congratulated himself on being three hours ahead of the priest and Don Gregorio, who would not start from the hotel before five o'clock. He was not thinking so much of them, however, as of Mary Summers, who was still quietly sleeping in her little white room at Ignacio Vera's, for Angela was so much better now that her nurse could leave her to her mother during the night. He knew that no bodily harm could come to Mary in La Providencia, but he feared the result of old Filipa's garrulity among her cronies in the market-place. La Providencia was an exceedingly fanatical town, and though several attempts had been made at different times to establish some form of evangelical work there, these schemes had been invariably thwarted by the vigilance of the priesthood, and La Providencia, as a site for missionary operations, had been finally abandoned for other more favorable openings.

So far as José had ever heard, there was not one Protestant in the town, and he had attempted to exact from Mary the promise that she would not walk out during the remaining days of her stay

there in order to shield her from the insults and disagreeable encounters which would be hers, if she should become known as an evangelistic teacher. He was sure that Father Esteban would not leave her movements unwatched, and there were many in the town who would become interested in her comings and goings, for Esteban was but one among a numerous band of priests stationed there. José knew that he could trust much to Miss Summers' own prudence however, and consoled himself with the recollection of the tact and wisdom with which she was wont to deal with the difficulties in her way, during her life on the ranch. He surmised also that her unwillingness to accede to his request the day before was very probably due to a feeling on her part that he was taking too much upon himself in presuming to dictate to her on such a subject.

"And not knowing all that I knew, she would have had reason to think so," he said to himself; "but I wished to spare her the uneasiness of knowing that she was being discussed by such men as Don Gregorio and the padre. After all, she is to be in La Providencia but two or three days longer, and Angela will not spare her often. Poor Angela," he thought, remorsefully; "poor, pretty little Angela! I wonder if Daniel settled their engagement when he was here. How glad I am that she has learned to love him, for I could not marry her now!"

As they approached Devil's Gate the horses hesitated and backed away from the cold, swift river which they could not see for the mist shrouding the banks. José's heart beat furiously as he urged his horse into the water, and the recollection of that other night, when he had last passed through the gate, took away all thought of the present moment. The water, however, had fallen considerably, and there was no difficulty in fording now, so that they were not long in reaching the hard road again at the other end of the pass between the cliffs.

On they traveled through the mist along the river-bank, the two companions in the rear too cold and sleepy for conversation, and José, on his big gray horse, very wide-awake and full of thought. As it had ceased raining twenty-four hours before, the road, which sloped toward the river-bank, was fairly good, and drained off the water which had stood in pools ten days before. As they ascended the rocky road leading up from the river, ushering them into the dim defile over the long crest of the hill, they left the river mist behind, and the air grew milder in the shelter of the pines.

José turned his face toward the sky, and found that it was beautifully clear, with the bright winter stars sparkling through the blue. It was now about four o'clock, and there was no sign as yet that day would ever break again over those sombre mountain heights. There was the moist,

sweet odor from the woods around, but not a sound broke the absolute silence save the tread of the horses' feet.

Every step was full of memories for José of those short, sweet hours when he had ridden there by Miss Summers' side, when, whether she spoke or not, the air had seemed filled with her presence. He was only a simple Mexican youth, far younger in some experiences than many a lad of eighteen in our enlightened country—younger even than his nephew, Captain Daniel, in many things. In his veins ran Indian as well as Spanish blood, and his education in books had so far been very meagre.

Long ago, ever since Mary had come into the little ranch-world, he himself had realized all this, and in his humility had always thought of her as a being different from himself, who must be considered quite apart from all other mortals, and he had never dared confess to himself what he had been forced to acknowledge to his nephew, Daniel, as they had walked together in the moonlight. Nothing had been farther from his thoughts than any intention of divulging his state of mind to the lady herself, and he shivered now with horror and dismay, as he recalled the passionate words he had spoken on rescuing her from the water.

Why could he not have kept silence, as he had so long done through so many months of mingled joy and pain? Why must the old life of happy watching for her fair, sweet face, as she passed

him on her way to school, or listening to her voice talking in the court to Petra, or leading the songs of the little ones, be at an end? It seemed to him as he rode slowly now, in the bewildering half-light which was softly creeping over the woods, that nothing could ever be the same again. He seemed to have betrayed the loved señorita, as well as himself, in his hasty words of relief and gladness as he had seen her eyes open again to the world, and had heard her voice calling his name. He would go on living, of course, and he would study his music and English just the same, for the señorita was kind and would be no different with him, but he was afraid of himself now, and could never again be so sure of his self-control as before. "She has already forgotten it all," he muttered to himself. "Such words as mine from a lowly-born Mexican to her, an angel of beauty and of goodness, are nothing more than this little mist down here is to the blue sky there where the stars are shining. Everybody loves her; she is used to that, and she does not understand that my love is different, that I would die for her to spare her a moment of grief or pain!"

As the little party neared the inn where they had taken dinner on the former journey, Antonio spurred his horse to José's side and asked if he wished to stop there for breakfast.

"No," José replied, "we will stop a little this side of the house, as I do not care to be talked to

by the men and women there. Besides, it is early and there will be nothing prepared for us. You have a sack of food for the horses, as I told you, have you not?"

"Yes, señor," the servant answered.

"Well, stop here and feed them. We will get to San Bernabé in time for breakfast at seven o'clock, but if you and your friend are hungry, here is bread and cheese," throwing across to the boy a package which his Aunt Isabel had slipped into his saddle-bags the night before. "Eat it all, I want nothing. And Antonio," he added, as he dismounted, "after breathing the horses a little and feeding them, follow me. I shall walk on until you overtake me. When you reach the path turning off from this road a little farther on to the right, turn into that path. It will bring us out on the prairie at some distance from the inn. You will find me in that path. And do not stop longer than ten minutes."

"Yes, señor," the boy repeated; "but Don José, do you not know that the path is much longer than the road and that it is very steep and rocky?"

"Yes, I know that," returned his master, briefly.

He did not wish to pass the inn where Father Esteban and Don Gregorio would stop for refreshment a few hours later, but not thinking it necessary to explain his motive to the boy, he set out on foot down the narrow path, and here his

thoughts recurred to the purpose of the priest's early visit to San Bernabé. He could determine upon no action beyond that of warning his father and mother of the fact of the visit, until he should know something more of the man's plans. He was sure that Father Esteban would be wary and slow to bring about an open rupture with the Vera family, and he himself proposed to keep his eyes open and to let none of the Jesuit's movements escape him.

Before long he was joined by his attendants and remounted his horse just as the path led down the last declivity and out upon the open stretch of prairie. Here the horses felt themselves at home, and picking up their ears responded eagerly to the touch of the spur that sent them galloping toward San Bernabé.

Now the eastern sky was golden, and a strange yellow light lay over the plain. The mountains rose black and somber against the bright heavens sweeping beyond their dark outlines, and the prairie dogs were beginning to peep out of their burrows and bark friendly good-mornings to their next-door neighbors.

The exchange from the damp gloom of the shadowy woods to the brightening prairie land gave a healthier tinge to José's thoughts as his horse sped over the level road, and something like hope revived in his breast.

"Whatever happens," he said half-aloud,

through his clenched teeth, "nothing shall touch *her*. Never again shall I speak to her as I did that night; nevertheless, I shall guard her, just as if I had a greater right to do so. She shall see no difference in me, for I shall learn to bear it better after a little, and I could not grieve her!"

He heard the two other horses quickening their steps behind, and before he could turn to see the cause of their haste, Antonio was riding at his side, and the stranger just behind.

"Don José," said the boy, "Pedro here has been telling me something that they were saying in the inn last night, while I was out with the horses. Is it true, señor, that you are a Protestant, and that you are going to be baptized very soon?" The boy's manner was very eager, as he looked at his companion for confirmation of his report.

"Let me hear all that Pedro heard said," José replied, looking around and motioning the man to approach. "What is it now, friend, that they say of me?"

"Why, señor, it was only what the boy has said, and I am sure I did not mean for him to tell it to you right away. As he says, he had gone out to feed the horses, and as he crossed the court where several of us were sitting, some one said, 'There goes the servant of that cursed Protestant!' Everybody exclaimed then, and asked him what he meant, and he said that you were the son of the richest man anywhere about, and that your

father was already a Protestant, while your mother was noted for her zeal as a Romanist, and that he had heard it said in the market that morning that you had followed your father, and would soon join the Evangelicals. He also said——"

"What?" demanded José, sharply.

"That you had better not be around La Providencia much, just now, as the padres had known how to make away with 'the followers of the cursed religion'—those were his words, sir—before now. I am glad you did not stay, señor, if you *are* what the man thought," concluded Pedro, looking slyly at José, from under the wide brim of his hat.

"But *are* you a Protestant, señor?" persisted Antonio, with the familiarity of a favored servant.

José had but a moment to prepare his reply to this question. Why should he hesitate to express himself now? Because in an hour it would be spread by Antonio all over San Bernabé, and in whatever ranch the fellow Pedro should choose to carry the news. He might bind them both over to silence for a while—but why? It might be necessary this very day to take his stand before his family and the priest, and there was no doubt in his mind as to what his course would be then.

"Yes, I am a Protestant," he replied at length, firmly, while the above reasoning surged through his brain.

Nothing more was said on either side. An-

tonio's face fell as he drew back silently to join the man Pedro, who in his turn rode on, with his jaw dropped and his eyes fixed on the back of the strange being who had just declared himself one of the "cursed sect."

José turned his face to the sun, which was just appearing above the mountain peak, and a light which was not all of the sun, broke over his contenance.

"Now I shall live!" was his thought. "The Son of God shall be my master, and I shall be his servant, and live in doing his will. God help me!" And this was the second prayer of José's life.

Meanwhile the priest and the schoolmaster were just entering the river pass, and Padre Esteban was idly wondering whose could be the fresh tracks in the black mud along the water's edge.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRIEST BAFFLED.

To those that are his, all things are not only easy to be borne, but even to be chosen. Their will is united to that Will which moves heaven and earth, which gives laws to angels, and rules the courses of the world.—*Manning.*

THE schoolmaster's mule had not long finished his dinner that same day in the little, thatched shed at home, when Padre Esteban rode sedately, as became a man of his holy calling, into San Bernabé. The ranch seemed very peaceful and quiet, basking in the afternoon sunlight, and here and there little family groups were collected about the house doors enjoying the change to blue skies and sunshine after the wet, gray weather of the past fortnight. Many a surprised look and hurried word or gesture of welcome, greeted the priest, as he slowly walked his horse past these groups of his parishioners. As he rounded the corner of a wall to turn into Eduardo Vera's court, he saw the figure of an old woman at a distance in front frantically beckoning to him, but he only smiled blandly, and greeting her with a wave of his hand, passed on to the great gates which stood hospitably open. He saw no one as he paused just out-

José.

side, and about the court and house there seemed an unusual stillness. The sunlight flooded the court-yard, and intensified the vivid colors of the flowers in the little garden-plot by the well, while the heat brought out the odor of the fennel growing luxuriantly in a border. The court had been freshly swept and sprinkled, for in Mexico a day's sunshine undoes much of the work of days of rain. All of the house was closed except the double doors of the *sala*, and these were thrown wide open, showing that the house was not entirely deserted.

If the priest had stopped to hear what old Juana had been so eager to tell him, as she signaled to him in the road, he would have learned that José was at home, having arrived from the town that morning. As he raised his hand to knock at the gate, some one left the *sala* and came toward him across the court, and his amazed eyes told him that this was the young man whom he had considered safe in La Providencia, thirty miles away.

José was carefully dressed, and he carried in his hand a book which he had been reading. Perhaps, below the surface, he was not so cool and unconcerned as his outward manner indicated. He met the priest with the grave courtesy becoming a son of the house, at whose doors no guest was received otherwise than hospitably, and his blue eyes were very bright and his face was pale, as he invited the priest to dismount.

"You are here," gasped the priest, in his first surprise, as José laid his hand upon the bridle of the horse, and signalled to Antonio who approached the gates from the outside. For a moment his self-command had forsaken him.

"Yes, señor," José replied, "I arrived this morning—only a few hours ago."

"And I have traveled all day alone. We might have been traveling companions, friend José," rejoined the other, recovering himself, "if each had only known the other's plans. As I passed through the village of La Concordia, some one told me that a horseman, resembling one of the Vera lads, had galloped through that morning early, and had stopped to speak with no one. I presume you have been paying a visit in S——, whence I come."

"Señor," returned José, sternly, fixing his penetrating blue eyes upon his companion's clean-shaven visage, "I came from La Providencia. I left that town just three hours before"—"yourself," he was about to say, but the time was not yet come for discussion—"before daybreak," he concluded.

"Ah," replied the priest, his own gaze falling before that of José, "then it was a mistake about your riding through La Concordia. I am glad, my son, that I find you at home, for there will be many things to speak of in connection with the dedication of the new chapel. Of course, I did

not expect to find it completed, coming, as I have done, so much in advance of the time of my last year's visit," he added, amicably.

They entered the *sala*, where the air was chill and damp, and the priest shivered at the exceeding stiffness and lack of warmth which he seemed to find in his reception, notwithstanding José's grave politeness. Where was Raquel, where was Petra, and the harmless old Baptist, Don Eduardo?

"My mother and sister have gone to visit my cousin, Martina Vera," remarked José, as if in answer to the padre's unspoken question. "They will not be long, I am sure, and my father has ridden over to El Porvenir with Benjamin. Shall we take our chairs into the court?" he added, noticing the priest's involuntary shiver at the chill aspect of the house. "In the sun it is quite warm."

And there in the sun they conversed upon all manner of indifferent subjects, until José began an account of little Juan's illness and death. Esteban listened attentively to this, and watched José furtively from beneath his downcast eyelids. José was speaking merely to pass the time, being quite assured that Don Gregorio had already told the whole story to the priest, as was indeed the truth, although Esteban's carefully chosen replies did not betray it.

"Old Juana nursed the boy, you say," said the latter. "What a pity it was that this young

American lady—who, they say, is equal to any doctor—could not have cared for him. He might then have been spared to his mother, poor woman!"

"Yes," assented José, wincing inwardly at this careless mention of Miss Summers by the man who was growing to be hateful to him. "It is true that he might have been saved, as my Cousin Angela has been."

"And is it true, José, all that they say of the little American, that she is as beautiful as she is wise and as good as she is beautiful? I hope," he continued, without waiting for an answer, "that I shall be so fortunate as to make her acquaintance while here. I hear that she is under your roof. Perhaps I shall meet her to-night. I know that these Americans are very willing to be thrown with us and to discuss the differences in our beliefs. And it would be worth a little of apparent sacrifice of one's own opinions to find favor in the eyes of a lovely young lady, eh, José?"

"I do not agree with you, señor," replied José, gravely and briefly. He was determined not to lose his temper with this man.

"I suppose she is out on some mission of charity just now, this young missionary. Am I right, José?"

"Yes, señor," replied José; "she is at present in La Providencia, nursing our Angela, who is ill of small-pox. Ah! here comes my nephew Daniel,"

as the young captain came across the court, his sword clanking at every step.

José was anxious not to lose sight of his guest during that first afternoon, so he seated himself again, after bringing out a chair for his nephew. After greetings between the captain and the priest, the former turned to José and asked:

"What news of Angela, José? I wished to see you before now, but my mother can scarcely bear me out of her sight, as I shall leave to-morrow or next day, and she kept me a prisoner all the morning. What of my cousin's health?"

"Angelita is better, Daniel, and will recover now. But what is this you are saying of going back to the city? I thought you had secured a renewal of your leave of absence."

"Yes, that is true. I do not mean, however, to spend all my vacation in this stupid place. I shall return to S——. There are to be grand doings there, I hear, padre, on the day of our lady."

"Yes, all of the faithful will do honor to our lady on that day, captain, more in the city, of course, than in a place like our ranch here," replied the priest. "Still," he continued, "we shall do what we can, even here, to make the day pleasant for the people, is it not so, José?"

"You know that I never take part in any of the religious feasts, señor," replied José.

"All I care for," interposed Daniel, "is to stand at the cathedral doors and watch the pretty señor-

itas going and coming, with the prayers on their lips and coquetry in their eyes; eh, *padre mío?*"

The padre smiled and held up a reproving forefinger, playfully saying, "Oh, you are heathen, you two!"

"But come now, Padre Esteban, confess to us two heathen, you who are father confessor to so many girls, which please you most, the pretty little creatures or the ugly ones?" This was from Daniel.

"I, señor *capitan*, am a priest of God. I look at the hearts which are laid bare in the confessional and not at the faces. Be careful, my son, and do not impute such worldly thoughts to one who, though unworthy, is one of Christ's vicars."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Daniel, with his harsh laugh. "You are still a man, nevertheless, and a young one, and you need not tell me that your material eyes see no difference between a pretty and an ugly face, whatever your spiritual eyes, if a man has any such, may see. Ha! ha! Why our Angela told me, when she returned home from her last confession to you——"

"Have done, Daniel!" commanded José now, with his face on fire. "Shame on you, sir, to jest about your own cousin with a stranger!"

"A *stranger*, am I?" thought the priest to himself. "Ah, there has been some change here; more than I thought. Come, courage, I must go

to the bottom of this matter, and understand what he means."

"That is right, José *mío*," he commented, aloud. "Never let the affairs of the family be discussed in public. But I am really hurt, my son, that you should consider me a stranger, and speak of the confessor of your family as such. What have I done to merit this?"

"I do not know that you have changed, señor," replied José, gravely. The priest noticed that the word "padre" had not once left his lips; it was always señor. "I have remarked no change at all in you."

"I was hoping," the priest proceeded, "that I should be able to prevail on you during this visit to come to confession. And I have heard," he added, tentatively, "of the probable betrothal between you and your cousin, Angela Vera. What more fitting than at such a time, so interesting and full of tenderness, to put yourself right with the church by means of the confession and the holy communion? Even I, however much a stranger, may be permitted to suggest this."

José allowed the man to finish what he had to say, and then replied, while Daniel sat by, silenced and curious:

"It is with God himself that I wish always to put myself right, señor, and that will be done without confession to a man, who is not unlike all other men in liability to be tempted

and to fall. 'The church' need not interfere in a matter between me and my God alone. Besides, you make a mistake about a betrothal between my cousin and myself. Such a thing has never been spoken of." José could not add, "nor thought of," for he knew in his inmost soul, that Angela had thought of it, at least before the coming of the brilliant young captain, and that he himself had dwelt not discontentedly, though secretly, upon the same idea some six months before. But, as he said, nothing had been definitely settled, and he had only gravely admired Angela's pretty airs and coquetry, without ever caring to wonder whether he would like them as well in a wife. Here José looked searchingly at Daniel, who seemed somewhat embarrassed by the look.

"Yes, I know," the priest replied, ignoring José's last statement as one not to be discussed in the presence of a third party. "Your feeling is only natural about the confession. It is easier for the women to avail themselves of the privilege than for us men, who have broader ideas and higher conceptions of what is due to ourselves. Their sins are only those of their little every-day lives, but they weigh so heavily on their more tender consciences that they eagerly embrace the opportunity of unburdening themselves to a sympathizing confessor. Now, we men," including both Daniel and José in his gracious glance,

"when we sin, go deeper than the women, and our very natures impel us to secrecy when we have gone wrong. We are as strong in living down our crimes in silence as in committing them."

This peroration delivered, the priest fixed his eyes in seemingly deep thought upon the ground at his feet while his companions, each in his own way, formed his opinion of the man.

"Whew!" thought the admiring little captain, "one would be almost willing to be a priest if one could learn to be as eloquent as this Padre Esteban. He must be a model father confessor, with his knowledge of human nature and his sympathy with its weakness. I shall leave all the year's sins with him to-morrow, and much good may they do him!" smiling lightly.

"This man could never commit a crime himself," José decided; "but he would not hesitate to persuade others to do so. What a deceitful coward he is!"

Both young men were spared an audible expression of the impression made by the padre's views, however, for at this moment the rest of the family entered the court and the subject of confession was dropped amid the greetings of the host and hostess. With the same studied politeness which José had shown, the young priest was welcomed by the elder members of the family; but he noticed that no one offered to kiss his plump, white hand as usual; only little Benjamin was the same, and the child

began immediately to search the pockets of the priest's long black coat for the sweetmeats he had always found there heretofore. In the hurried departure from La Providencia, however, Esteban had forgotten to provide himself with the usual dainties, and the spoiled little boy, on making the discovery that the pockets were empty, tore himself from the priest's encircling arms and stood defiantly at José's knee, declaring:

"You are bad, señor padre, and I do not love you any more. Now I shall never be a priest, for priests tell lies. You promised me an orange and some dried figs and you have brought me nothing at all. I do not love you!" and he stamped his small foot in anger, while tears of disappointment filled his eyes.

"Never mind, little brother," whispered José, drawing the boy to his knee. "Perhaps there were no oranges and figs where the señor comes from, but I have brought you something from La Providencia. Run now and bring me the saddle-bags from my room."

Benjamin was soon comforted with the nuts found in José's bags and took no further notice of the discomfited priest.

After supper all felt that the time had come when an understanding must be brought about, even at the risk of an open rupture, for anything was better than this formal display of friendliness.

So, when Daniel declared himself charged with

a message from his mother, Doña Rosa, to the priest, to the effect that he should come and sit with her till bedtime, José interposed and reminded the priest of his expressed wish to talk of certain matters of business. The latter therefore, sent a polite message of regret to Doña Rosa and promised to see her later in the evening. Daniel, divining that his company was not especially desired, took himself off, and the door of the *sala* had scarcely closed upon him when the priest began, in his ready way :

"We have had no time yet, señora, to speak of the subject most interesting to me now, and no doubt to you also and to your family. I refer to the new chapel of Our Lady of Solitude, which seems nearly ready for use."

He paused a moment, but as no one offered to speak, he continued : "I have hastened my journey hither, thinking that my presence among the workmen might stimulate them to greater efforts to complete the building so that it may be dedicated by the new year. Was I right?" he asked, looking from one to the other of his audience. José was about to reply, when Raquel, making him a sign to be silent, replied, with quiet dignity :

"Señor Esteban Lopez has as much right as any one to come to San Bernabé whenever he wishes to do so. He has never been opposed in his coming in the past, nor will he be in the

future. As far as the building of the chapel is concerned, that is at an end, señor."

Father Esteban tried to look very much astonished at this news, but José's keen, blue eyes were upon him, and he felt at greater disadvantage than at any previous time in his rather successful clerical life. He was determined to carry this affair through with patience and skill, however, for the higher powers in La Providencia, had expressed themselves as entirely satisfied with his promise to manage the Vera affair with wisdom and prudence. So he only exclaimed in mild surprise:

"At an end, señora! Ah, you are thinking of the rains of the past weeks and of the cold. Now that both are over for a season, we shall go ahead with renewed zeal. Is that not what you mean, Señora Vera?"

"Señor, my mother meant only what she said," answered José, before Raquel could reply. "The building is at an end. I remarked awhile ago, señor, you will remember, that you had not changed. Now we wish to tell you that it is we who have changed, and for this reason I did not wish you to leave the house until you understood us perfectly. My mother and sister would like to tell you, what I shall do for them, that they are no longer Roman Catholics, having embraced the evangelical form of belief, and I am with them with all my heart."

Padre Esteban almost gasped at this glaring confirmation of Don Gregorio's suspicions with regard to the women, and with the added shock of José's declaration as to himself.

"So you see, señor, why the building of the chapel has come to an end; also, perhaps, why I cannot be expected to confess to you," José concluded.

"I never expected you to do such a thing, Don José," replied Esteban, with some heat; "you have never confessed to me, and I should have let you take your own headstrong way. But these dear ones here," his voice changing to sadness; "oh, my friends, is it possible that I have heard aright? Can it be that you are going to allow yourselves to be torn from the bosom of the holy mother church by—by this woman, of whom you know nothing, who comes here and upsets the minds of the whole community with her deceitful——"

"Hold your tongue, man!" cried José, goaded to anger by this attack on the woman who was sacred to him. "I beg your pardon," he added, hastily, "but I think we may leave the Señorita Summers out of this question; at least I beg you to speak respectfully of her, or not at all."

Padre Esteban shrugged his shoulders expressively, and his pale face flushed, but his policy was to be as cool as possible; so he only noticed José's qualification of his first remark by a cold nod, and

continued addressing the two women. Don Eduardo was watching the faces about him with sharp eyes, and straining his ears to hear more than came to him when their voices were raised in moments of excitement. Seeing his intent expression, Raquel left her seat for one at the old man's side, and laying one hand upon his, was careful during the rest of the conversation to speak so that he could hear.

"Rumors had already reached me, señora, of certain expressions of yours which would have given me uneasiness but for my utter confidence in your fidelity to the church and to your vows. And I am come here now," the priest added, with a tinge of severity in his tone, though his eyes were downcast before José's gaze, "with the authority of the canons of the church, whom I left in La Providencia in grave unrest concerning your defection."

"In La Providencia?" interrupted José, who was tired of all this useless duplicity. "You said that you came from the other direction."

"Did I not say La Providencia?" retorted the priest. "Certainly I left them in conclave *there*, when I departed to go to S——, on a matter of equal importance with this business. It has not been so very long, Don José, that I cannot remember the grave and even threatening expression of their faces, as they charged me to return to them by way of San Bernabé.

"He is a clever rascal, after all," sighed José.

"As I was saying, when José became particular to hear the details of my route hither," the priest continued, "I am charged by the higher officers of the district to which San Bernabé belongs, to carry to them a true account of the sentiments of your family toward the most Holy Church."

"Señor, I fear that you did not understand my son, nor me," interposed Raquel, "although it is difficult to be more plain. I have become convinced of my errors of belief in what I know is a form of faith contrary to the teaching of the Bible, and I have resolved to follow what I know must be the truth, as I have found it in the Bible. I shall join the Baptist church, to which my husband already belongs, on the first opportunity."

"And I also, señor," added Petra.

"And I also," repeated José's deep voice.

"Yes, friend Esteban," chimed in the old father, who understood thoroughly the point now reached, "we are now a united family, and we shall try to serve our God in simplicity and honesty for the rest of our lives."

"Is this final?" asked the priest, after a moment of silence, while his thin lips worked with suppressed anger.

"It is final," replied José, briefly.

"And the chapel, Señora Vera?"

"The building will be put to some other use, señor," replied Raquel.

"Then," said the priest, rising, "there is no further use of our speaking together. I shall pass the night at the house of my *friend*, Doña Rosa, your daughter-in-law," laying particular emphasis on the word "friend."

"Your room is ready, Señor Lopez, if you care to remain with us. It is quite late now," remarked Raquel, hospitably.

"Thanks, señora," he replied, "I could not sleep here, I fear, and I find myself quite fatigued from my long journey, so I will bid you good-night."

José accompanied the man to the gates and not a word was exchanged until they were about to part. Then José remarked with some emphasis:

"If there is to be any more discussion of this matter, señor, let it be with me. The women in there have expressed their intentions plainly enough. They need not come into this any more. You will kindly refer to me any one who may not sufficiently understand our position."

"Certainly, José," Esteban responded, amicably. "Yet do not suppose for an instant that I do not understand perfectly the reasons for your conversion to the Protestant faith." The tone in which he spoke was so full of meaning that José could not fail to understand its significance. He held his peace, however, and contented himself with saying, before he closed and barred the gates behind his visitor:

"It is only fair to tell you, señor, that I heard a part of your conversation with Don Gregorio yesterday in the church in La Providencia, and that I shall be upon my guard accordingly." This admission was not very wise, perhaps, but José could not resist the opportunity for giving this last sting.

"Cursed ingrate!" muttered the priest. And he ground his teeth with rage, as the gates closed behind him, and he turned his steps toward Doña Rosa's house.

CHAPTER XIX.

PRAYERS TO THE SAINTS.

Definite work is not always that which is cut and squared for us, but that which comes as a claim upon the conscience, whether it is nursing in a hospital, or hemming a handkerchief.—*E. M. Sewell.*

"IT is nice to be getting well, Señorita María, even though I do look such a fright," Angela remarked one afternoon, after José had been gone a few days. Mary had been persuaded to defer her return to San Bernabé awhile longer, as Angela's comfort still depended, in a great degree, upon her care.

"Are you a fright, Angela?" Mary asked. "How do you know that, child?"

"Because I made Filipa bring me a mirror this morning, while you and mamma were at breakfast, and I saw myself. How horrible I am with these great, dry scabs and red splotches all over my face and hands!"

They were alone in Angela's room, and the sick girl lay propped upon two or three pillows, watching her friend, who was seated at her side, sewing. The latter had recovered her bloom and cheerfulness with Angela's returning health, and her patient watched with pleasure the white hands

that were engaged in making a little black silk cap for the bare, shaved head resting upon the pillows.

"Do you know what my first prayer shall be, señorita, when I am able to cross the plaza to the church?"

"No, indeed, Angela, I cannot imagine. I know what *my* first prayer would be on recovering from sickness; but I do not think I should wait to be able to go to church before praying."

"Oh, but we are different, you know. Now, as you would never guess it, I am going to tell you. I shall go to the little chapel of Our Lady of Solitude, where the picture shows her walking away so sadly from the cross after the crucifixion, and stepping along exactly in the bloody foot-prints that our Lord made on the way to Calvary, and I shall ask her to—what do you think?—to make my new hair grow out beautiful and golden like yours! There, you will laugh at me!"

"No, dear Angela, I am not laughing, for I feel very little like doing so."

"Why, you look sorry, señorita! What have I said to grieve you? You do not know how hard it is to lose all my good looks," and the girl's voice trembled. "It does not matter so much while you are here with me, but soon you will be gone, and I shall *never* want to go to San Bernabe again."

"Why not, Angela?" Mary asked, gently.

"Because José will never like to look at me again! There, I have told you," burying her poor, scarred face in the pillow. "But if the holy virgin would only give me hair like yours, perhaps he would not mind the rest."

"Angela," replied Mary, gravely, "I think we must talk a little about this. Tell me, dear child, do you really believe that if you should pray all the days of your life, before a picture of Mary the mother of Jesus, you would have an answer to your prayer?"

"I do not think you understand, señorita," interrupted Doña Isabel, who had entered quietly, and now sat down by her daughter's side. "We do not expect anything from the *pictures* of Mary when we pray before them."

"But mamma," exclaimed Angela, eagerly, "the pictures of saints do indeed work wondrous miracles sometimes. Do you not know that our *tortilla* woman always sells all of her *tortillas* on the days that she turns the Black Saint face downward upon the floor and tramples upon him?"

"Why, Angela, I never heard of that superstition before. What is it, Doña Isabel?" asked Mary, laughing.

"You may laugh, señorita; but it is said to be true of the Black Saint that he is propitiated by disrespect, just as all the rest must be treated with honor and deference. Have you never heard the story of the Black Saint?"

"No," replied Mary, "but I should like to hear it."

"It is said that San Benito of Palermo was so very beautiful that he was constantly interrupted in his devotions and meditations by ladies who were in love with him, and who were always seeking opportunities of being in his company; and so great were the jealousies caused by all this that he finally prayed to God to make him so hideously ugly that he might be left in peace by the women. His prayer was answered, and he waked one morning to find himself as black and ugly as he could wish. And after that he was let alone by his sweethearts and became the most devout of all the saints. I do not understand the reason of it, but we are taught that his picture must be treated with all manner of contempt in order to propitiate him."

"Sometimes he is buried in the ash pile," added Angela, smiling in spite of herself. "And Filipa says that the *tortilla* woman grinds him in the dirt under her foot before she goes to market."

"But surely, Doña Isabel, you do not believe in this?" asked Mary, incredulously. "I know that the most ignorant have these strange, unnatural beliefs in the power of certain images and pictures; but you are different."

"Well, señorita," replied the woman, cautiously, "I cannot exactly say that I believe such tales, for I have never had any proof of their truth; yet

neither can I say that they may not be true, after all. Who knows?"

"What is your idea then in worshiping these images and pictures here in this house and in the church?"

"Ah, that is quite simple; we do not worship the picture, we are only praying to the saint whom the picture represents. The picture gives us something real to fix our eyes upon while we pray to the invisible one. Do you see? And it makes it easier."

"Then you think of these representations as portraits of those who have been dead for ages and ages, or have never existed at all?"

"Not exactly, señorita," replied the woman, with a slightly puzzled face. It was easy for her to think that she understood all this herself, but the young lady's question seemed a little hard to answer, and Angela was listening attentively.

"Of course, it would not be possible to know just the exact features of one who had been dead so long as you say," Isabel continued; "but the histories tell a great deal about them, and it does not so much matter, after all, whether they are good likenesses or not if the saints themselves were good men and women and worthy to be examples for us," she ended, a little triumphantly, yet wistfully.

"I agree with you so far as that goes," assented the young missionary, who had laid her work

down now, and was looking into Doña Isabel's face with a thoughtful expression in her dark-blue eyes. "I am sure it will be of little consequence to us after we are dead what kind of pictures are made of us, if after all we have led good and honest lives here. But Doña Isabel, it seems to me that the important question is, not whether the pictures are good likenesses or not, but rather, is any one right in praying to these pictures as the ignorant certainly do, or in praying to Mary and the saints, as you call Paul and Peter and others, through these pictures as you do? Is not this the question for us?"

"Why should it be wrong, señorita?" asked Angela, as her mother was silent.

"What is forbidden by God must be wrong; is it not so, Angela?"

"Of course," replied the girl, readily.

"This is not forbidden," said Isabel; "the priests teach us to offer such prayers."

"Have you ever read God's law, Doña Isabel?"

"No," she acknowledged.

"Nor the teachings of our Saviour on the subject of worship and prayer?"

"No," she replied again.

"Nor the letters that the apostles wrote to the little churches which were established through the country after the Lord's death?"

"No, I have read nothing of all that. I have read the lives of the saints, which tell of wonder-

ful things wrought by them when alive and after death. It is all very interesting, is it not, Angela?"

"Do you know that they are true accounts of these lives?"

"I cannot say; but I suppose I know as much about them as you can about the sayings of Christ and of the apostles. They lived before most of the saints!"

"Yes, that is true; but you know the Bible, which contains all that I have mentioned, was inspired by God,—even your priests acknowledge that,—and it contains the expression of his will toward us. We should always obey that will. There may be mistakes in all that men write and teach, but God never makes a mistake. He teaches us that it is robbing him to give honor and worship to others in his stead. We disobey him when we ascribe to others the divine power of forgiveness, and we pain him every time we put another in his place of sovereignty over us."

"Of course I know that God is all-powerful, and that there is none greater," said Isabel, thoughtfully, and Mary could see that she was beginning to understand her thought.

"Then why offer prayers to Mary, who was just as human as you and I are, when God is ready to hear all our petitions and when his Son spent his earthly life for us and 'ever lives to make intercession for us'? I know how you feel about it,

that it is easier to approach a woman and tell your needs to her, and that she may bear them to her Son; but my dear friend, what did Mary do on earth to prove her love for you? I doubt whether she ever thought much about the coming generations who were to be saved by her Son's life and death. She recognized him as the Saviour of the world, and as her Saviour, it is true, but she loved him also with a deep, human love, just such love as you have for Angela here. The Bible tells us almost nothing about Mary, and anything more than what it tells is pure legend and superstition. I want you to try and believe this, Doña Isabel, for you know that I could not tell you an untruth, and even many of the priests know the teachings of the Bible about this as well as I do."

"They do not care for us to read the Bible, I know," admitted Doña Isabel.

"And you can very well understand why they do not if I am right in what I tell you. You would read, in one place, where Paul is writing to Timothy, 'There is one God and one Mediator between God and man, *the man Christ Jesus.*' What room do you find here for Jesus' mother, or for the saints, as mediators?"

"Then the Virgin Mary is really no more than any other mother; do you believe that, señorita? Impossible!" exclaimed Isabel.

"Of course, I do not expect in one day to convince you of the error of what you have been

taught all your life, dear friend," replied Mary, gently; "I wish you, however, to think about what we have said, and to talk with me freely. I can only tell you what God's word says, and I think that if you can believe that it contains the whole truth, you will be more than willing to follow it. Am I right?"

"Yes," Isabel admitted slowly, "I suppose I can agree to that. We ought all to wish to know the truth."

"Would I not be glad to catch Padre Esteban in a downright lie?" and Angela laughed, gleefully. Then her face fell as she exclaimed, pathetically: "But then, señorita, what about my hair? If I cannot pray to Mary, if she has no power to answer my prayer, what shall I do? And then, suppose it *never* grows again, at all?"

"Angela, there is always God, who will hear your prayers. But, I do not believe that you would go to your own mother even, with an absolutely foolish request, would you, asking for something which could not possibly do you any good, nor make you any happier? Come, now, let us try to understand this. God is our Father, patient, loving, kind, and wise; more so than any earthly father can be. Before making any requests of him we do not have to trouble ourselves with the question as to whether the answer we wish be possible or not, for God is all-powerful. But we must try to be sensible human beings, and in

making requests of him not treat him as if we were the only persons in the world, and as if God had no laws of his own. We may tell him freely our needs and our desires, and we may be sure that we shall have an answer of some kind, if not exactly what we may have expected. He understands us better than we do ourselves, and knows, before we ask him, what we desire to have; but he is our Father, and likes to have us go to him in trust and love with our desires, just as your mother likes for you to express your wishes to her, and the answer will come, you may be sure. You may ask him for yellow hair, and he could give it to you, but you would soon be very sorry for such a gift. You would be more of a 'fright' than you are now, Angela."

"Would I?" questioned the girl, shamefacedly.

"Yes, dear, with your brown skin and black eyes and red cheeks your own dark hair is very becoming, while my hair would make you a curiosity. I like you best just as you are, or as you will be when the short, black curls begin to grow all over your head and the red scars all fade away. Still, understand me, Angela, I do not mean to say that you may not go to God with any desire of your heart, if you only go with earnestness and trust in him that he will do what is best and right."

"I only thought that the virgin would be so much more interested in me, a young girl, than

her Son could be," said Angela, ruefully. "And I am so ugly now!" Two tears escaped from the poor, inflamed eyes and rolled down her stiff, swollen cheeks.

"There, my little darling," murmured the mother, bending over her daughter and stroking her head tenderly, "your mother and your father love you just as you are, and so does the señorita. I will not have your poor eyes full of tears. Do you not know that before very long all these scabs will fall away and then the redness will leave, and we hope you will not have very many scars, for María has taken such good care of your poor face and hands."

"Who told you how to do it, señorita?" Angela asked, presently. "Here we often have small-pox, but I never heard of any one who was not badly scarred."

"God helped me, Angela, by giving me opportunities to learn about a great many kinds of sicknesses. Perhaps you will pray to him now to make you quite well and not to destroy all your beauty, and then how wonderful to think that it may be that he was preparing to answer your prayer years ago when he was helping me to study about small-pox in the hospital, and much farther back than that, for he can begin to answer prayers thousands of years before they are prayed. Is it not wonderful? And could anybody but God do that?"

"No, indeed!" declared Angela. "And mamma, do you not see what a muddle everything would get into if those dead men, the saints, had it to manage? Suppose Anita, next door, would pray to Saint Antonio that it might rain, and I should be begging that it might not, what would the poor man do between us? I suppose God would know how to manage much better."

"Hush, Angela," said the mother, who began to feel uneasy lest the conversation had gone too far, and a little uncertain as to the points which she had been induced to concede. "Of course you know that the saints, and Mary too, only intercede for us with God. It is he who rules the universe, of course."

"Then let us go to him directly and not through others, Doña Isabel," pleaded Mary. "I shall give you a text to think about while I go out for a walk, Angela, as the sun is so warm and bright. This is it: 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.' These are Jesus' own words and we need nothing more than this to teach us that God will hear every petition we may carry to him, and that the answer will come according to his will. And now, good-bye for a little while. Will you not come also, Doña Isabel," she asked, remembering José's advice and willing to sacrifice her own choice to please the woman, who was looking thoughtful and even a little sad.

"I cannot let you both go at once," objected Angela, nervously, and the mother declined Mary's invitation at once. She followed her outside the door, however, and whispered, hurriedly:

"I believe that what you have said is all true, señorita, or at least that it is better doctrine for mothers and young girls than what the padres teach them. I have just begun to think about it lately since Angela has been going to confession, and I believe that the God you have been telling us about is safer for a young girl's confessor than a handsome young man, priest though he may be. Do not say that I have told you this, however; the child must not know, nor her father, but I am thinking and watching all the time."

"And God will help you to learn the truth, Doña Isabel, if you ask him. If I am sure of anything, it is that he is ready to direct all those who really wish to do his will."

CHAPTER XX.

LEARNING AN AVE MARIA.

Through all my little daily cares there is
One thought that comfort brings whene'er it comes:
'Tis this: God knows.
—*H. M. Kimball.*

THE bright December sunshine made even the narrow, paved streets of the little town inviting, as Miss Summers stepped out upon the cobblestones. La Providencia was exactly like a hundred other small towns of Mexico. The houses, all of one story, presented an unbroken line of stuccoed wall, from street corner to street corner, with barred windows and heavy double doors. Some houses were colored blue, others yellow, or green, or brown; and in the more pretentious ones, there was usually a small door cut in one of the large double doors, which could be used on ordinary occasions of exit or of entrance like the "needle's eye" of the walls and houses of Palestine. Often the double entrances were not thrown open for years, and then only when a coach was to be stabled in the paved hallway. At most of the street corners there was a wine shop where small groceries were also sold, while the other shops were ranged, facing the small plaza in front

of Doña Isabel's house. The church of San Antonio also, as has been said, looked upon this open square, as did the post-office, a house not unlike all the other houses of the town, except that it bore a flag-staff upon the roof over the entrance. One-half of this house was occupied by the hotel, and the two departments were divided by a great, paved hallway leading from the street back into a paved court. This court, having a large fountain in the center, was half filled with a stage coach, carriages, carts, donkeys, and dogs. From the plaza, which occupied the center of the town, all the streets branched off, and finally terminated in a country lane or were brought to a dead stop against some garden wall. There were no sidewalks at all, except the one surrounding the plaza; and though horses and vehicles were expected to keep in the middle of the way, and human beings on the sides next to the houses, the order was often reversed, and great, brawny women cried their hot corn, or goat's milk cheese, from the very middle of the street, while donkeys, laden with sacks of charcoal, left traces of their burden upon the walls of the houses as they squeezed by.

The streets were full of people, and animated vociferations, as here and there a drove of donkeys threatened to monopolize the way, when the young teacher crossed the plaza and then took a street leading to the market square, a few blocks farther on. Once she had to take refuge in a

doorway from a flock of kids driven by, and on looking over her shoulder she found the door opening directly into a dim little room, where a gray-haired woman sat poring over a little book. The woman looked up as a shadow fell across the page she was reading, and on seeing Mary standing there, smiling down upon her, she smiled too and invited her to enter.

"Come in, *huerita* (little fair-haired one)," she insisted, "and rest awhile in my poor room."

Nothing loth, she accepted the invitation, for the sweet, old face pleased her, with its coarse gray hair and piercing black eyes—a very different face, however, from old Juana's at the ranch. Old age in Mexico is often most unlovely, and even revolting, among the poorest classes, when the dark, withered skin stretched over the aged frame looks like soiled brown leather, and the nose and chin meet over toothless, mumbling mouths. Yet where there is cleanliness and neatness of dress there are exceptions to this rule, and this old woman looked fresh and sweet in her clean skirt and white cotton sacque. She was sitting in a low chair, and at her feet was a basket filled with scraps, from which she had been attempting to mend a man's shirt. The shirt, however, lay neglected upon her knee, and she had been intent upon her reading before Mary's arrival. The latter seated herself upon a stool and waited for what the old lady would say next.

"How pretty you are, little one!" were the first words. "Your skin is like milk and roses, and your eyes are like a little bit of sky, and your hair like golden threads. Where have you come from?"

"From San Bernabé, mother. Do you not know the big ranch of the Veras, down in the plain?"

"No, no, child. I have never heard of it, for I have not long been here. My son brought me here only a few weeks ago, from our own little ranch on this side of the mountains, and I know nothing of what lies on the other side. Ah," she sighed, "the sights and sounds of the city weary me already, and I long to get back to my old home. But I like to hear the bells of the church of San Antonio, for they are very fine, and the picture of our blessed lady is more beautiful than any I ever saw before."

"And you can read," said Mary; "that helps you to pass the time. What is it you are reading, mother?"

"Oh, the most beautiful account of our lady of the rosary. Only look at this picture, señorita, and see the beautiful virgin and the holy Child letting their long rosaries down into the pit—how deep and dark it is!"

"But what does it mean? I never saw this picture before."

"Impossible! But I will tell you, and then

you will count your beads with more zeal than ever, little one. The deep, dark pit is *limbo*, and that you know is the place where the souls of all the dead babies go, if they have not been baptized. There is a great darkness there, señorita, and the helpless little ones suffer so horribly in the awful darkness, away from their mothers, and the little creatures climb and climb up the sides of the pit, only to fall back again into the deep, dreadful blackness." She paused for breath, and her voice was trembling, for the thought of *limbo* is one that few Roman Catholic mothers can dwell upon with calmness.

"How dreadful the religion that teaches such folly and misery!" Mary said to herself, sighing.

"But, see in the picture, senorita, how some little white souls are clambering up out of the pit, helped by the rosaries of the mother and Child. Look how lovely Mary's face is, and how the Child is smiling down upon the babies."

"And are all saved in this way?" Mary asked.

"No, señorita. Only the children of mothers who are constant in telling their beads and complete the whole rosary many times a day. My little Margarita died an hour after she was born, and there was no time to call a priest, for she had seemed a likely child. When they told me my little child had gone to *limbo*, it nearly killed me, for she was my first baby, and I could not bear to think of the tender little thing cry-

ing down there in the dark all by herself, and I used to think I heard her wailing all through the dark nights and the sunny days, which were all the same to my baby then. I had been gay and thoughtless before her birth, and cared more for my husband and my little house than for going to mass and confession; but all was changed after my baby left me, and I took to my beads with the greatest zeal, and kept candles burning, night and day, before the picture of our lady in our *sala*, and I stayed in the chapel all day long, on my knees, except when I had to prepare my Juan's meals. Finally, I fell sick again, with fasting and the cold of the church, but I would not leave off my praying until the padre one day told me that he had had a vision, in which he saw my Margarita clasped in the holy mother's arms and sleeping with her little head tucked close to her bosom; then I knew that she was safe, and I soon got well and happy again."

"Mother, could you believe that your innocent little one was anywhere but safe in heaven, from the moment she left you?"

"Yes, señorita; because, you see, she had not been baptized," was the answer, in a tone of settled conviction.

"And I suppose you tell your beads still for the sake of other miserable little souls?"

"Of course I do, and for my own sake too; do you see how long my rosary is? The flames of

purgatory will not reach to my waist, for my rosary hangs far below it. I hope you wear yours long also, señorita, and are very careful to say all your *ave Marías* and the *paternosters* every night and morning."

"I have no rosary at all, Doña ——, what may I call you?"

"Sofia," the woman replied.

"I do not even know how to say an *ave*, Doña Sofia, though I do know the Lord's prayer."

"May the holy saints in heaven protect us!" exclaimed Doña Sofia, in consternation. "Not know an *ave*, why you must be a pagan; and are they all so in the ranch where you came from?"

Perhaps any other person in town, on hearing Mary's confession, would have murmured the hated term *protestante*, but Sofia had evidently never heard of this sect, and believed all the world either Roman Catholics or pagans.

"I shall teach you the *ave María*, my dear child, and then you will say one for every bead until you have said nine, then will come one of these large beads which is a *paternoster*, and so on until you come around to where you started; now, listen: 'Hail, most holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and in the hour of our death, Amen.' See, it is very easy." The good old woman looked eagerly into Mary's eyes, which were filled with tears.

"Dear friend," she said, taking in hers the

brown, wrinkled hands extended to her, "I cannot say that prayer to Mary; I pray only to God. No, do not interrupt me, please, for it is growing very late and I must hurry away. Let me come to see you again soon and I will then tell you why I must pray only to God. I am not a pagan, but I do not worship Mary the mother of Jesus. Shall I come another day and tell you all about it?"

"Certainly, señorita, if you will honor my poor home by coming," Sofia replied, with a puzzled face. "Perhaps then you will make me understand why you wear no rosary and do not even know the *ave María.*"

"Good-bye then, Doña Sofia; I shall come again to-morrow."

She left the old woman standing nodding good-bye in the doorway, and did not notice a man in the long, black garb of a priest on the opposite side of the street. The setting sun was sending his last rays in a blinding glory of light through the street as she kept on her way to the market-place. Angela had expressed a wish for a banana, and Mary hoped to be able to find the fruit stalls still open; the market, in fact, presented a most busy scene at this hour, and in the crowd of people hustling each other, she attracted little notice, as she looked about her for the fruit she wished. The market was simply a roof, supported by numerous stone pillars and arches, and the paved floor was raised several feet above the four streets

surrounding it, and was reached by stone steps at each of the four corners. It was but a small place, and Mary had made almost the entire circuit of the building before she found the bananas. The sun had set, and the sudden twilight peculiar to southern lands fell over the city. A woman was sitting on the floor, behind a white cloth spread on the stones, and containing little heaps of fruit —apples, oranges, and bananas. Mary had just completed her bargain with the woman and had transferred the bananas from the ground to her handkerchief, when she saw two men standing in one of the arches near by, intent upon some bargain with a neighboring market woman. They would not have called forth any especial attention from her except that they wore long ulsters, and one of them a soft, felt hat, intensely American (*i. e.*, not Mexican), of the kind styled "knock-about." A flaring torch was just then stuck into its place in the archway, and Mary gave a start, and almost exclaimed aloud in her delight.

She went nearer the two gentlemen and laid her hand gently on the gray sleeve next her, and was rewarded by the sight of a start equal to her own, as she said:

"Mr. Richards! How glad I am to see you!"

"Miss Summers!" he exclaimed, in amazement. "Can it be possible?"

"Indeed it is I!" returned Mary. "And I am so thankful you have come. You are needed

greatly now. And I hope you will take me right on with you to San Bernabé."

"Yes," Mr. Richards replied. "But I beg your pardon, Douglas; let me introduce you to Miss Summers. Miss Summers, our new missionary, Mr. Douglas. I have been giving him a bird's-eye view of this part of our mission field, and we intended to take the diligence to-morrow at noon for San Bernabé."

Mr. Douglas and Mary greeted each other with the warmth that "strangers in a strange land" often feel one for another, and then they left the market and strolled toward Don Ignacio's house in the dusk. They did not pass Doña Sofia's house, as they took another street; but Mary resolved to steal a moment in the morning, before leaving town, for another talk with her. Mary's heart was lighter than it had been for many weeks when she finally laid her head upon her pillow that night. Doña Isabel and her husband had welcomed the gentlemen, for Mary's sake, and when they left for the hotel at a late hour, their plans were all arranged for leaving La Providencia the next day. Mary slept and dreamed, and her dreams were bitter and sweet. Once she seemed to have been trying for ages to crawl up the steep, slippery sides of a dark pit, in vain, while old Juana sat at the mouth and grinned, and pushed her back whenever she seemed about to escape. Then, at last, a man with a shining face had come

to the edge, and calling her by name, had reached down and helped her out of the mire and darkness, but the hair and hazel eyes of the man were the hair and eyes of Roger Douglas, and they went walking together, hand in hand, over sunny, grassy fields which seemed to have no end.

The next morning she slipped away while Doña Isabel was busy with Angela, and hurried to the door, where she had left Doña Sofia waving a farewell the evening before. The door was closed, and there was no sign of any occupant within; Sofia was gone.[1] Mary was sure that she had made no mistake in the house, for the window next door contained three large cages of noisy parrots. She had noticed them yesterday, as she stood watching the flock of kids go by, and now, as a woman's head appeared between the two lower cages, she resolved to question her.

"Yes, Doña Sofia lived there yesterday," replied the woman, curtly, and with rude indifference, while she scanned Mary from head to foot.

"Then has she gone to market?" Mary persisted, though her face burned at the woman's impudent manner. "And will you tell her when she returns that I came again, as I promised?"

"She will not return. Her son came and took her to another house which you will not find, I can tell you."

"Why did she leave, will you tell me?"

[1] A true incident.

"Because she entertained the evil one unawares, yesterday afternoon, and her son and the Padre Diego came and carried her away where he will not find her. Do you understand?" the woman concluded, with a rude laugh.

Too well Mary understood, and her heart was heavy as she turned away from the woman, whose jeering tones had brought several other heads to the neighboring windows. Why had she not said a little more to old Sofia while there was an opportunity? And now she would never see her again. Still she had done what had seemed to her best, not knowing what would happen the next day, and she had long ago learned to leave her "best" in her Father's hands.

This disappointment, added to the real sorrow she felt at leaving Angela and the rest of the family, threw such a grave shadow over her face that when the hour for leaving arrived Mr. Douglas could scarcely believe it was the same face that had sparkled at him and laughed in the market place the night before.

As they parted, Doña Isabel whispered into her ear, after she had taken leave of Angela, sobbing in her bed:

"I shall send her to you when she is well. Her father has given his promise that she may go, and you will come to us again some day."

"And meantime, you will not forget all we have talked about by your little daughter's sick-

bed. Read the Bible I have given to Angela and pray to God alone that he will teach you the truth. Do you promise, Doña Isabel?"

"With all my heart, señorita," she replied.

When all the farewells were said, the diligence, which had stopped at Ignacio's house for its last passengers, rumbled off down the street and toward the river, and Mary found herself turning with a yearning heart toward San Bernabé and the dear friends who were awaiting her there.

During the journey Mr. Richards was posted as to the state of things at the rauch, and noticing the young missionary's harassed look as she spoke of the priest's dreaded visit and of the chapel question, he felt that he had not come too soon. He would carry her back with him to spend the Christmas holidays with his wife and merry children.

Roger Douglas thought he had never seen a sweeter face than the one which looked up into Mr. Richards', as he proposed this plan, and Miss Summers answered:

"I thank you very much, Mr. Richards, and I do long to hold a little white child in my arms again; but I cannot leave my people just now. They need me, and you know you gave me to them."

CHAPTER XXI.

HOME AGAIN.

Thou art my King—
My king henceforth alone;
And I, thy servant, Lord, am all thine own.
Give me thy strength; oh! let thy dwelling be
In this poor heart that pants, my Lord, for thee.
—*G. Tersteegen.*

IT was quite dark before the clumsy diligence landed its bruised and weary passengers at Don Eduardo's gates.

As it was Saturday night, and the morrow was to be a day full of work and possible excitement, the travelers retired to their rooms at an early hour. Miss Summers was too tired to sleep, and gladly listened to Refugio's chatter, as she lay on the bed and rested. She learned that Padre Esteban had left the ranch after a stay of several days, and that he had held services every day in Doña Rosa's *sala*, where an altar had been improvised and mass celebrated with the usual little boys as assistants. On the previous Sunday he had preached a sermon, inciting all the Catholics in the ranch to greater faith and zeal, and the attendance had been so large that the congregation had overflowed into the hall and court, while the win-

dows and doors were blocked with people outside. He had especially warned his hearers against the messenger of Satan, in the form of the fair-skinned young woman, who was leading some of the sheep astray from the fold, and he had tried to exact promises from them that they would not attend the evangelical services. Many hands had been raised, Refugio said, but quite as many remained unresponsive to the priest's suggested test of fidelity to the mother church. And Señor Jiminez had preached such a good sermon that night in the little Baptist chapel, not against the Catholics at all, nor alluding to Padre Esteban. It was all about the great love of Christ to men, and the love of Christians for each other, as the real test of fidelity to him. Don Eduardo with all his family, José included, had been present, and some one else, the senorita could not guess who!

"Captain Daniel?" Mary ventured.

"No, he is all and all with the padre," Refugio replied; "and they were rarely apart while the priest stayed at Daniel's house; you will never guess, so I will tell you—Doña Martina!"

"Oh, Refugio!" Mary exclaimed, after a moment of silent gratitude. "Did she come alone, poor thing?"

"Yes, she walked in a little late, with a black shawl thrown over her head, and almost hiding her face. She sat down by Petra, and after the

meeting she came home with us, and it was she who told us about Padre Esteban's sermon in the morning. She was indignant at what he said about you. And, señorita, she talked about Juanito, and said that she almost went crazy while her boy was ill and begging for you, and that if it had not been for her husband and Doña Juana, she would have sent for you at first. She told José, when he walked home with her that night, that she intended to attend our church always now, for Don Juan, her husband, has not been drunk since Juanito died, and he says she may come."

"I am very thankful for that, Cuca, and about José also. I could hardly believe that he had announced publicly that he was a Christian, although I have known for a long while that he was more than half convinced."

"Did you know that he played the organ for us Sunday night? He practised hymns almost all day Saturday with the doors shut, and Sunday morning, when Señor Jiminez read out the first one on the list that José had given him, José got up from his seat very quietly and sat down at the organ and played so beautifully. Señorita, I wish you could have seen his face, it was so calm and beautiful!" Refugio's eyes were moist and the hand lying on Mary's pillow trembled visibly.

A hasty thought darted through Mary's mind, to be as hastily rejected: could this child, who was

really a woman now, love José, who was kind and tender to all women? Why might it not be? And what happiness it would be for Mary herself to feel that Refugio would be so safe and—but poor disfigured Angela! No, she would lay no plans of this kind. This was not a part of her work.

Refugio was talking of José's confession before his friends and servants at the evening service when Miss Summers found herself listening to her again; and she heard how brave and manly he had looked then as he told them all in a few words of his wish to be a Christian and to be baptized as Christ had been.

"And señorita," Refugio concluded, "I also wish to be baptized to-morrow night when Doña Raquel and Petra and José and the others are."

Her teacher had hoped for this news, but she had been unwilling to hurry Refugio to this point. Now, after talking with her awhile on the subject, and being satisfied that she loved the Saviour and realized the significance of the ordinance, she promised to speak with Mr. Richards in the morning.

Long after Mary fell asleep, out in the court the windlass and chain of the well groaned and creaked as José and another man drew water by the bucketful for filling the baptistery close at hand. Years before, this baptistery had been built in Eduardo's courtyard between the well and the flower-plot.

It consisted of a space seven feet by five, on a level with the paving of the court and surrounded by a well-built, cemented wall four or five feet high. When filled with water this furnished an excellent baptistery, and when not in use it was covered with a close lid of boards after the water had been drawn off.

There was no moon, but the stars beamed brightly down upon what seemed a peaceful, sleeping village. Here and there, however, there were wakeful, anxious hearts.

By midnight Miss Summers and her companion, who now occupied a cot in the ante-room, were resting quietly, all hope or dread banished from the young missionary's dreamless sleep of exhaustion.

In a room not far away the two American gentlemen were discussing the situation from the new point of view offered them by José's account of the events of the past few days.

"Do you apprehend any trouble from this priest and his colleague the school-master?" the younger man asked.

"Yes, I do," Mr. Richards replied. "And so does José, though we were careful not to let the women imagine such a thing. I know both of the men well. Esteban is a coward himself, but he knows how to work on the other people, and José has good reason to believe that he has stirred up some of the more fanatical to be on the watch

against Miss Summers' return and any especial services that may be observed at the union of these prominent characters with our church. He had no reason, I suppose, to apprehend my coming, but José thinks that he is skulking in one of the neighboring villages not far away. Don Gregorio is a desperate character where his religion, as he calls it, is concerned, and though he has made a pretence of keeping school these last few days, he has been seen all about the ranch at odd times and in a way foreign to his usual mode of life. I cannot say what it is I apprehend, but it will be as well for us all to be upon our guard during the entire day to-morrow, as we number but fifty odd, while the other party is numerically much stronger."

"I longed to understand you all to-night, when talking of these things in the parlor. One feels like a deaf mute as far as understanding goes, when hearing an unknown language."

"*Paciencia, amigo mio!*"[1] returned the older man, smiling, as he looked at his watch. "You will soon be jabbering like the rest of us, thinking you know a great deal of Spanish, and only kept from realizing how ridiculous you make yourself by the politeness of these Mexicans. And now let us go to bed; it is after midnight."

Don Gregorio, about the same time, was sitting in his one-roomed cottage, poring over a slip of

[1] Patience, my friend!

paper which he had just found lying beside the candlestick when he returned from a round among the homes of several of his friends in the ranch. The paper read :

"Do *nothing* until I see you. R. and another are on the ground, and it will not be safe. *Wait.*"

"Too late!" he muttered. "And even if it were not, it must be done. I myself will be the avenger, and the little proselyter will soon learn to sing a new tune!" He had insensibly raised his voice with the last words, and a muffled "Ha! ha!" chuckled beneath his window outside startled him out of his mad thoughts.

It was only Juana, who chuckled louder as the man threw open his door and looked out.

"Yes, yes," she cried, catching him by the hand and shaking it in an ecstacy; "the storm is coming, Mariquita, and the holy mother will not save you this time, nor will the little captain, either!"

Gregorio shook her off as if she had been a viper and slammed the door in her face, while he tottered, trembling, to his bed.

José worked on quietly under the stars, until the last bucketful had been emptied into the basin and the other man had departed.

The night breeze drove little ripples across the surface of the water, and he leaned his arms upon the edge of the pool and gazed sadly down into its cold depths.

"She will love him," he thought, "for he also is fair and handsome. He loves her already, I think, for he could not take his eyes from her face to-night when she talked. *Misericordia de Dios!*[1] Why must it be?"

Then he turned his white face up to the sparkling sky, and a quiet resignation settled over his spirit.

"'Thy will be done,'" he murmured, softly; "and help me to know what it is, so that I may do it always, all the days of my life!"

The Lord's Day dawned cold and clear. Captain Daniel, who had deferred his departure from San Bernabé for reasons best known to himself, sat moodily outside his father's door, as the little cracked bell rang for morning service. He was in full view of his grandfather's gates, and had seen the whole household start a few moments before for the chapel. He did not see, however, that the four men of the party wore pistols under their coats, although their faces were cheerful and serene. From here and there appeared other persons, quietly making their way toward the same point, and before many moments had passed the hated music of some hymn was ringing out upon the sweet freshness of the day. "The chapel must be slowly filling," thought the captain, for soon there were many persons gathered outside, and the doorway seemed choked with eager listeners.

[1] Mercy of God.

When the clear tones of Mr. Richards' voice, addressing the people, met his ear, he could bear no more, and with an angry kick at his sword, he marched off in an opposite direction, toward the unfinished walls of Doña Raquel's chapel.

Under the little tree in the open space before the barn, which served for the threshing floor in the autumn, there was a knot of women standing, who looked up as Daniel clattered by. He responded to their greetings in a surly manner, and after he had passed some shrugged their shoulders, and one said:

"He is no good; for all his soldier uniform and his straight back, he is a coward. Strange, when his mother is so firm and hates those singing devils down there like poison!"

"Ah, but Danielito is more than half in love with the pretty little gold-hair, and that may explain a good deal," old Juana croaked, shaking her fists toward the mission house and spitting vindictively upon the ground at her feet.

Daniel walked on, all unconscious of these remarks, and when he reached the tower, only too well remembered by himself, he found that the building was occupied, for voices reached him from around the corner of the wall. He followed the sounds, and reaching the side looking out upon the prairie and invisible from the ranch, he came upon another little group. Here there were no women. Don Gregorio was sitting in an angle

of the wall, holding a scrap of paper in his hand, while the remaining five or six men seemed divided upon some question.

As Daniel approached, all turned to him except Gregorio, who kept up an indistinct muttering to himself. One, who seemed a kind of leader of the others and of rather a more pleasing appearance than the rest, explained to Daniel the purport of the message received by Gregorio the preceding night, and signified his own intention of abiding by the directions given in the note. The other men were not so temperate, and urged Daniel to declare that it was now too late to go back upon plans already made. Daniel was silent. The sight of the young missionary in all her freshness and sweetness, as she had nodded to him on her way to church less than an hour ago, had already undone much of the Padre Esteban's training during the past week, and he was fast coming to the resolution of running away that day and taking no part in the indignity to be put upon the little church that night. He knew that Esteban's plan had been only to scatter the worshipers after they should have gathered for evening service, by means of a few shots into the air and a wild shouting and threatening from a mob outside, who could easily overcome any resistance; and afterward, a final destruction of the mission house and property by fire.

"No lives need be lost," the wily priest had

suggested; "but the scare will be worth much, and the señorita will be afraid to venture back again soon."

When Don Gregorio had declared this project weak, and that it would be productive of no permanent change in the real state of affairs, he had been overruled by the more influential younger man, and the plan was adopted. Now that Mr. Richards had arrived, the priest was afraid that such an attack could not be carried through, and he was not yet ready for personal injury to come to Miss Summers. So he had sent the counter-orders to Don Gregorio, who had just communicated them to the men.

All this passed through Daniel's brain as he pretended to be pondering deeply over the scrap of paper which one of the men had snatched from Gregorio's trembling fingers and put into his hand. Then, with a feigned sigh, he said:

"I suppose we must abide by the padre's commands, friends. As he suggests, the enemy is stronger now than a week ago, and we would better defer any action until the visitors leave."

A grunt of disapproval broke from Gregorio, and the men turned sullenly away, except the one who had first spoken to Daniel.

"Come, Diego," said Daniel, as he looked at his grave companion. "Let us ride over to La Bienvenida to mass there, and if there is nothing to prevent, we will make a day of it."

The other agreed, and before the services were over in the mission chapel, the two companions were trotting toward La Bienvenida in the west, and breathing more freely, as their ponies shook from their feet the dust of San Bernabé.

The morning passed happily within the walls, which but twice more were to shelter the faithful flock gathered there on that twenty-first day of December. The inspiring words and magnetic presence of the elder missionary, as he preached the gospel, as only he knew how, to the thirsty seekers after truth who thronged the little room, touched many hearts that day. After what she had heard, Miss Summers was not surprised to see the tall, thin figure of Martina arise when an opportunity was given at the close of the service for those who wished to confess their faith in Christ and desired to follow his commands.

When she looked into the faces of Raquel and of Petra, of Refugio and José, and of two or three others who had for some time been waiting for such an opportunity, as they stood in their places, she wondered if she could ever be faithless or discouraged again. The tears rolled unchecked down her cheeks, as she sat in her place before the little organ at the preacher's right hand.

There were no vacant places in front, nor in the aisle between the rows of benches, and the candidates were compelled to rise and stand by their seats during the long searching examination made

of each in turn by Mr. Richards. As one after another gave satisfactory answers, a verse of some hymn was sung softly and tenderly, and once or twice Mary was almost overcome, as José's full, rich voice was heard above the rest.

"What a brave fellow he is," she thought, as she watched his bright, unconscious face. "Refugio was right. There is a beauty in his face that I never saw before. He has forgotten his sadness in his great joy. Thank God!"

Roger Douglas stood beside Mr. Richards during the examinations, and from time to time put questions to the candidates, which were translated into Spanish by Mr. Richards. This seemed to bring the whole band into greater harmony, and to make them forget the strange face and voice in the one absorbing theme which united them.

When all the professions had been heard, and the candidates had been accepted, except one or two who were advised to wait longer for a little further instruction, the benediction was pronounced, and the congregation dispersed quietly to their homes.

The afternoon passed as usual with Sunday-school at an early hour, and then the three missionaries walked home together, weary indeed, but very happy in the undisturbed peace of the day. The congregation had been invited to an early evening service, and to the ordinance of baptism afterward in Don Eduardo's court.

"We shall have our men about in the crowd that will surely attend the baptism," Mr. Richards was saying, as they neared the court-yard gates; "and they will notice any signs of disturbance and promptly quell it. After such a happy day, however," he continued, lifting his hat from his head, and looking upward as if in gratitude to the Ruler of all things, "I hardly think we need fear anything more than a stone or two thrown. I have rarely escaped something of the kind here, on such occasions."

Mary shivered as she heard these words, for she was only a woman, and the thought of possible injury to those whom she had come to love with all her heart, was terrifying to her. And over her joy, like a cloud passing over the sun at midday, just then there flashed the recollection of old Juana's crazy prophecy twice repeated to her. She shivered again, and Roger Douglas saw her face grow pale.

"Come, Miss Summers," he said, briskly, "you are chilly and I am cold; it is early yet, let us go for a walk on the plains, in the sunshine. I dread going into these shivery Mexican houses, which always have the air of a tomb."

She gladly accepted, and as Mr. Richards went toward the house, she called Refugio to accompany them, and they went out upon the sunny plain.

"I think I shall have at least one of the rooms

of my house roofed with glass," said Douglas, laughing, when they had left the ranch behind them. "Then there will be one room always warm, as long as the sun is shining."

"And you could use it for an oven in the summer," returned his companion, brightly, tightening her hold upon Refugio's hand, so that the girl might not feel entirely neglected during the English talk.

Then they fell to more serious talk, and each learned something of the other's former life and of the ardent aspirations for the work before them.

"One becomes so absorbed in the life of these people when thrown with them as I have been," Miss Summers confessed, "that one's former life grows vague and unreal,—not that I forget my dear ones at home," she added hastily, "or ever could do so. If they needed me, however, or if by my absence they were deprived of anything more than my society, I could not so heartily identify myself with these new relations and surroundings. Mr. Douglas, do you not think that God sometimes lets the path of duty lie very clear before us? I have never had a doubt but that he meant for me to come here, although in times of discouragement, I have felt sure that something was lacking in me, and in my way of getting at the people."

"And I am sure you feel with me, Miss Summers," Douglas replied, "that a missionary ought

to wait for just such an utter conviction as to his duty as you experienced, before he undertakes such a serious matter as devoting his life to mission work. It ought to be one's life-work, do you not think so?"

"As far as it is possible for him as a Christain to make it so, yes," she assented.

They were silent after that, as they watched the gorgeous setting of the sun behind the burning masses of crimson and purple clouds in the distance. The air again grew cold and crisp, as in the early morning, and as they still walked away from the ranch the sunset glow irradiated their faces, and the solemn beauty of the scene touched their hearts.

"How beautiful it is, señorita!" Refugio whispered, when they finally paused to take a farewell look at the changing colors of the clouds, before turning homeward. "And there is the new moon opposite! See how bright and silvery it looks in the blue sky!"

"Our baby Mary at home calls it 'God's little silver lamp, hanging in the sky,'" said Mary, smiling to Mr. Douglas.

Then the faint notes of a bell came across the plain to them, and they hastened homeward, realizing that this was the first bell ringing for evening service.

Douglas' object had been accomplished, for, when they arrived at home warm and breathless

only just in time to eat a mouthful of supper before going to church, he saw that Mary had laid aside her fears, and that her cheeks were glowing with renewed strength.

José, standing in the doorway of the *sala*, had seen them go off together, and was surprised to find that he could smile at the sight. His renunciation of himself to the will of God had been hearty and complete, and although the smile was a little sad, he was beginning to feel that there was still much left to him, so long as he should be faithful to that Will which he had adopted as his guide through life.

CHAPTER XXII.

OLD JUANA'S PROPHECY FULFILLED.

We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.—*Romans 6 : 4.*

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.—*1 Thess. 4 : 14.*

THE western horizon still glowed red as a large congregation assembled in the chapel, and the silver crescent moon still held her own in the darkening sky.

Mary Summers never again caught such a glimpse of the heavens without a sharp thrill, first of gladness at the recollection of that afternoon walk on the prairie, and then one of horror, at the memory of what had followed, later on in the night.

The sermon was short and simple, treating of Christian baptism as believed in and practised by Baptists, and all of the arguments produced were derived from the New Testament itself, which Mr. Richards held open in his hand, during the service. In closing he made a tender and striking allusion to death and the resurrection, so beautifully set forth in the sacred rite.

After the service was concluded, he invited

those of the congregation who wished to be present at the baptism to proceed directly to the Vera courtyard, and, at the same time, he begged that perfect order and decorum should be observed during the administration of the ordinance.

Those who were somewhat anxiously watching the signs of the temper of the crowd noticed that a half-restrained eagerness seemed leading most of the outsiders toward the Vera gates, but that when the entrance was reached very few actually entered besides the members of the church and the candidates for baptism. The others slipped away to their homes or lounged about the walls outside, and this looked ominous to Mr. Richards, who was one of the last to enter. He whispered a word to José, who immediately called two men and stationed them inside of the entrance; these were to close and bar the gates at the least demonstration of hostility from without.

The sight within was a striking one, as some sixty persons gathered about the baptistery in the center of the court. Several had torches, which flared redly over the dark, earnest faces watching the minister as he ascended the steps outside of the baptistery and then descended into the water. Miss Summers' clear voice began the baptismal hymn:

"Liquid grave, emblem of the Lord's,"

and the solemn tune of Zion, taken up by most of the voices, rose into the night and sounded far

out over the prairie, where two horsemen stood silent as statues in the darkness.

Fathers lifted little wide-eyed children to their shoulders that they might see the strange, wonderful sight and mothers held their sleeping babies to their bosoms with a closer clasp as one after another of the candidates was led into the "liquid grave." There was something very solemn in the reiterated: "In obedience to the command of our divine Lord and Master, I baptize thee," as first Refugio, then Raquel and the others following, obeyed their Master's command. As José, after all the others mounted the steps, paused for a moment before stepping into the water, Miss Summers, with Mr. Douglas at her side, saw that he took a pistol from his belt and laid it on the edge of the pool. Just then a heavy column of dense smoke rose from near by in the ranch, and an odor of burning caused anxious looks to be cast from one to the other on the part of the spectators. As the service was so near the end, however, no one moved from his place.

Mary's voice, trembling a little now, began the closing lines of another verse of the hymn, just as José emerged from the water:

Y es mi gloria,
Sepultarme con Jesus.[1]

Mr. Richards' voice was raised in the benedic-

[1] And it is my glory,
To be buried with Jesus.

tion, when a lurid light burst from the cloud of smoke, and for a few moments it seemed as if Don Eduardo's house itself must be ablaze, so near the fire seemed.

At the same moment, from behind the high wall, there rained down upon the people assembled in the court, such a shower of stones, that for a moment every one seemed paralyzed with consternation. Then shrieks resounded through the court, and the screams of frightened children were mingled with the deeper tones of the men, who hurried the women into the house as soon as possible. Still the stones were hurled in upon them with great force as thick as hail, while here and there a larger rock crashed down upon the pavement. To make the confusion greater, the torches were thrown down by the bearers and extinguished, and the light from the burning mission house outside, died out as the roof fell in with its thick layer of earth upon it, and the darkness was complete. Fortunately the doors of the house were all open, lights were struck, and before many moments the weaker ones were huddled inside, while the stones still fell without. The men had rushed to the gates as soon as the women and children were safe, and they found that those who had been put there to guard the entrance had done their part well. The gates were heavily barred within, and there seemed no attempt to force them open. The stones kept the

men dodging continually, as there was no cessation in the rocky fire.

"We may as well go inside," Mr. Richards said, after an instant or two of examination of the gates. "The cowards will only fight from behind the walls, and here we run the risk of having our heads broken. Let us go, Douglas, to Miss Summers; perhaps there are some hurt in there."

"The mission chapel is gone, sir," remarked José, who was sheltering himself in the deep gateway.

"Perhaps they will fire this house also," suggested Douglas, "and drive us out."

"They could not fire it from outside," José replied, understanding the remark. "They must have broken into the schoolhouse and filled it with straw."

"Where do these stones come from?" Douglas gasped, as they rushed across the court again toward the first open door. "They seem to have no end to them."

"The prairie is strewn with them. They arranged the attack while we were in church, I suppose."

They entered the house and found themselves in Miss Summers' room, which was crowded with frightened women and sobbing children.

"Come, Mr. Richards, to poor Luisa and look at her baby," Mary begged when she saw them. "I have done all that I could, but I am afraid it

is dying. See its poor head! One of the first stones struck it and it has not moved since."

Then she whispered to Mr. Douglas, who was dismayed at the piteous sight of Luisa's grief:

"There are others too, cut and bruised. I am very faint and must have a little air. Help them, please, while I stand a moment at the door. It will pass soon," she added, as he exclaimed at the pallor of her face. "We are so crowded in here, that is all. They have stopped throwing stones now, and I hear nothing at all."

Mr. Douglas joined Mr. Richards, and Miss Summers stood alone just outside of the door. The ground was covered with the missiles, and no one was in sight in the court except a few men gathered silently about the gates.

Presently she was sure she heard a groan from a dark corner at the other end of the house, and she darted across the court without calling any one in her haste. Fallen in a heap she found old Eduardo Vera, lying just as a large stone had struck him to the ground. In the crowded rooms he had evidently not been missed. She was just bending to lift his head when a strong hand seized her by the shoulder, and looking up in terror, she saw the face of Gregorio, distorted with madness, within six inches of her own. He carried a long, keen knife in his free hand, and Mary's head reeled as he hissed at her a string of foul names, ending with:

"You thought you had escaped, did you, you little daughter of Satan? Ha! the rocks made too tame work for me, and I have been waiting here all the time for you in the dark. Now I have you, and by the holy virgin and all the saints, you have done the last of your vile proselyting, for there! and there!" He struck wildly at her breast, but found himself pinioned from behind by arms stronger than his own, and he lost his grip on the knife, not, however, before his own hand was dripping with the blood he had drawn from the victim he had struck.

When Mary crossed the band of light streaming from her door, and ran out into the court, José, from his station at the gate, had seen her with dismay and hurried after her. He feared a chance rock thrown, or he scarcely knew what, and fear urged him to her side just in time to fling himself beneath Gregorio's hand, and to receive both blows from the sharp knife. Then all three rolled to the ground, and Mary found her voice and screamed with terror.

They were surrounded in an instant. Don Gregorio, foaming and gnashing his teeth, was held and securely bound by a dozen men, while Mary and José were helped to the house. Then, the lantern in somebody's hand discovered the motionless body of Eduardo, lying a few feet from where the others had fallen. Great lamentations filled the air as they bore their unconscious bur-

dens into the great *sala*, which was nearest to hand. Mary quickly recovered her outward composure and set about helping with the wounded.

While Mr. Richards and Mr. Douglas examined José's wounds, Miss Summers dispatched Refugio to the medicine closet for sponges and bandages, and then she went to the old man, who lay, breathing heavily, on the mattress which had been arranged for him on the floor of the *sala*. Raquel and Petra knelt at his side weeping, while Mary applied restoratives. A sickening bruise on the top of his bald head, from which he had lifted his hat as the benediction was pronounced, told to all that there was no hope.

Then the men called Mary to José, and she hastened over to his mattress to dress his wounds. He also was unconscious now, from loss of blood, as the first knife thrust had severed a small artery in the right arm, and the blood had gushed forth in a heavy stream. His clinging, wet sleeve had partly stayed the flow, and Mary lost no time in finding the artery, tying it and putting the necessary stitches in the wound. Then she gently and skillfully bandaged the arm. The other wound was in the left hand, which the knife blade had pierced through the palm. Both men stood by and marveled at the deftness of the white hands as they bathed and dressed and bandaged this last wound also; but no one spoke.

"The antiseptic gauze with which I have

dressed the places," she explained, presently, "will prevent any inflammation, I hope, in healing. I do not think the wounds are dangerous, but they will be very painful, particularly that in the hand. I do not understand why he was not killed." She shuddered as she spoke.

As José showed signs of reviving, she begged Mr. Richards to have him carried to his own room, as the sight of his father on the floor would be overwhelming for the poor fellow.

Luisa still crouched in Mary's room, moaning over the dead baby on her lap, and several other women sat around her, trying to comfort her.

"My Pablito, my pretty boy!" she groaned. "They have killed you, my poor little innocent!"

Martina tried to take the baby from her arms, for her heart ached for this poor little mother's heart; but Luisa held the little form tightly wrapped in her shawl and took no notice of any one.

Mr. Douglas, wandering about the house and court after helping to settle José in his own bed, came upon the little knot of women at Mary's door, and after watching the stricken mother's grief for a moment, hurried in to Mr. Richards, who sat beside José.

"Where is the father of that dead baby, Richards? He ought to be there with his wife. I never saw such a sad sight in my life. The woman

looks crazy. Where do you think I could find the father?"

"Do you know, José?" Mr. Richards asked the young man. "Luisa's baby, you know, is dead, and where is the father?"

José shook his head, and then murmured feebly: "He is gone off to the city of Mexico, they say."

"You can do nothing for her," said Mr. Richards. "Leave her to Miss Summers."

Meanwhile the stertorous breathing of the dying man in the *sala* had ceased, and his breath was growing faint when Mr. Douglas again went into the room. Mary was kneeling close beside the old man, who had opened his eyes, and was trying to say something, but in vain.

After a few struggles for breath he closed his eyes and turned his poor gray head on one side as if for sleep. Watching his face intently, Miss Summers saw his lips move again, and bending close to his mouth, she caught the halting words, which were the last he ever spoke:

"Es mi gloria,
Sepultarme con Jesus!"

They were the last words of the hymn that had been upon his lips as he had bowed his head to receive the benediction, and lo! the blessing had come to him, and to little Pablito, in the shape of speedy and perhaps painless death.

The ranch was quiet by one o'clock. Stern-looking armed men patrolled the street and by-

ways, with hearts sick and sore over the death of their aged head, and the silence was unbroken during the night. José had ordered this watch to be kept, so that the women might return to their homes in safety.

Martina had persuaded Luisa to accompany her to her home, and gradually the premises were emptied of the crowd lingering about the doors. The crazy school teacher was carried to his own house between two strong men, who were to guard him until morning. He walked off mumbling incoherently to himself, and there could be no doubt that he was deranged. Miss Summers shuddered as she saw from her window the man struggling with his keepers on the road outside, and then with a heavy sigh she turned away from the beautiful starlit night, which a few hours ago had seemed so peaceful.

She had sent Refugio to bed, and had put on a loose wrapper for the night, and was beginning to brush out her long, beautiful hair, when some one knocked at the door.

"It is I, Miss Mary," said Mr. Richards, as he knocked. "I hope that you have not retired, for José is a little wild and is calling for you. Could you come for a moment? Yes, just as you are," he continued, as she opened the door and hesitated. "It is only to satisfy him that you are unhurt. He has not seen you, you know, and though I have assured him that you are all right, he keeps

rousing to ask for you. At this rate he will get no sleep at all. Poor girl, you are so tired, are you not?" as Mary sighed deeply. They were in the court now.

"It is not that, Mr. Richards. But why has there been all the horror of this night when everything seemed so plain and so happy?"

"We are in the Lord's hands, my dear Miss Mary," he replied, simply, leading her to José's bedside.

"Here I am, José," she said, soothingly, a moment after as he started up restlessly from the pillow. "It is you who are hurt, and not I; you saved my life, perhaps, do you know that, José?"

"Then I am happy," he answered, feebly. "If I die, I shall die happy that I saved your life, señorita." He looked earnestly at her as she stood beside him in her dark-blue gown, with her fair hair loosened and half shading her face.

"You will not die, José," Mary replied, "if you lie quietly now and sleep. To-morrow you will feel almost well again, though your arm and hand may be stiff and sore for some time. Good-night, now; try to sleep." José's dark eyes followed her to the door, then closed gently and he slept. Mr. Richards rested his weary frame on the other bed in the room, while Roger Douglas sat down quietly beside the window, watching for the morning to break over the purple hills.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BURIAL.

We know that all things work together for good to them that love God. — *Rom. 8 : 28.*

THE next afternoon, just before sunset, all that was left of Eduardo Vera and the little baby, after their souls had returned to God, was laid to rest in the Campo Santo. In accordance with the Mexican law, which forbids any act of worship outside the walls of a house, the bodies were lowered into the graves without either prayer or hymn accompanying the burial. There had been a tender service held in the Vera *sala*, however, before the procession had left for the cemetery, and the solemnity of the utter silence during the burial seemed to Mary Summers more touching than any human words could have made it.

José had insisted on attending the funeral, and he stood between his step-mother and Petra, with each arm in a sling, looking very white and exhausted, but perfectly calm. Every one was quiet and thoughtful as if the preacher's last words as they left the house were still sounding in their ears, with the comfort of their meaning taking away most of the sting of death.

"I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

The next few days were devoted by Mr. Richards to doing what he could toward settling affairs at the ranch. The mission chapel and schoolhouse was a blackened ruin, and everything which it contained had been destroyed. The wind scattered all through the ranch pages from the Bible, which had been torn to pieces when the mob first broke into the chapel. Many of these leaves were covertly snatched from the road and hidden away carefully, to be read by those who had been foremost in the hatred of the "cursed doctrine." And who knows that this seed sown by the wayside was not to bear fruit?

Don Gregorio was sent to S——, to be confined in the hospital for the insane there, as he continued to show every symptom of insanity. And Mary breathed more freely when he was shut in a special coach, and driven off with his two keepers.

There was no means of ascertaining all of the true actors in the assault, and Mr. Douglas thought it strange that the affair was not immediately put into the hands of a vigorous police.

"Are murder and arson to go unnoticed and unpunished in this manner?" he exclaimed, restlessly, on the third day.

"It does seem hard, Douglas," replied Mr. Richards; "but you can have no idea how difficult it is in this country to get an affair like this taken up with any judgment or success. Of course, it has been reported to the authorities at La Providencia. But you will see that nothing is done. There is no doubt that some of the lower Vera kin were mixed up in it, and the elder heads of the family will take pains to hush it up. Indeed, Roger, we do not know that Doña Rosa Vera herself, Eduardo's daughter-in-law, was not one of the chief instigators in the disturbance, though of course she had nothing to do with Gregorio's violence. The loss of life is something to be forever regretted, as old Eduardo's death is a real calamity to the ranch, but our work here will not be hurt in the least. I think it probable that there will be a reaction in our favor after this, for the priest Esteban will keep clear of the place for a long while now."

The two gentlemen were sitting on a stone bench which extended the length of one end of the barn, at some distance from the house, and were waiting for Miss Summers, who was to join them there, after the dressing of José's wounds.

The barn occupied one side of the little open square in the center of the ranch, and from this seat in the shade, they could see the women going to and from the well under the little willow tree, with their large red water jars upon their shoul-

ders. A few men lounged there as usual, and the little ones were at their play.

A subdued hush rested over the ranch, and the women's voices were toned to a lower key than usual as they passed hither and thither about their work.

"Perhaps you are right, Richards," Mr. Douglas continued. "Of course, you know this country better than I do. But is there no justice done when crime is committed?"

"Certainly; and I do not mean to say that many of the laws are not wise, and sometimes faithfully carried out. But we are Protestants, you know; and I need say no more, when you hear that this place comes under the jurisdiction of the authorities at La Providencia. Perhaps this afternoon, or to-morrow, or next week, a couple of mounted police will come galloping in from that town, and with a great show of deference to José and Doña Raquel, and of zeal in searching for the offenders, will clatter about the ranch and ask impertinent questions of each one of us Americans. Then, after mysterious conversations together, they will gallop back to La Providencia, carrying a prisoner or two, who will just as likely as not be entirely innocent. It is not cowardice, believe me, that keeps us from appealing to the authorities; it is rather the perplexities involved in making out a case against any one in particular, and by experience gained by long

years of life among this people, and by fruitless effort at having anything like justice done our own followers. We shall be ready, without doubt, to appear as witnesses if there is a legal inquiry made into the facts, yet José agreed with me that anything beyond informing the mayor at La Providencia of the murder and attack, was out of the question. But here comes Miss Summers. How white and tired she looks, poor girl!"

José and Petra accompanied her, and soon after Raquel and little Benjamin followed them toward the great barn.

"Mr. Richards," Miss Summers began, as she sat down with the two other women, "before I walk on with you to El Porvenir, to see the Guiterrez family, José wishes to tell you something which he has just heard. He did not wish to interrupt you now, but I told him our walk could wait for a while."

"Yes, now is the best time, friends," replied Mr. Richards, heartily. "But sit down my friend," he added to José, "you look pale and faint. How are the wounds to-day?"

"The señorita says they are doing well, and I am in very little pain, thank you," José replied, taking his seat.

"Well, let us hear this business which you have to talk over with me." Then glancing up in some surprise, as José was silent, he saw him looking with a peculiar gaze at a figure standing in

Doña Rosa's doorway. It was Captain Daniel, arrested for a moment in coming out of the house by the sight of the group at the barn door. He was turning back hastily into the house when José called :

"Daniel! Come out here for a moment."

After an instant's hesitation, the soldier obeyed, and came slowly toward them.

"I have not had an opportunity of speaking with you, Daniel, since—since last Sunday night, and as they tell me you are leaving to-day, I must not lose this one. I shall not detain you," he continued, sternly, as Daniel pretended to look around for a seat, "as I only wish to ask you one or two questions. Where were you during last Sunday night?"

Daniel answered readily enough :

"I spent the whole day Sunday in La Bienvenida and returned at midnight, as my mother can tell you." He had feared a more difficult question.

"You knew the plan of our enemies and went away from the ranch to avoid being concerned in it ; am I right?"

Daniel shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you have?" he replied. "I alone could not have persuaded them to give up their design,—I tried, indeed."

"What would I have?" repeated José, with white lips. "I would have my murdered father alive

now! I would have that murdered, innocent child again in his mother's arms! I would have our mission chapel again as it was! And I will tell you what I *will* have," he continued, rising from his seat and stepping nearer to Daniel, who cringed before the tall, commanding figure standing above him; "if you are not out of the way by six o'clock this afternoon, when the police come from La Providencia, I shall hand you over to them, as the vile traitor that you are! Do not think that I do not know of more than one crime of yours during these weeks that you have spent here, which I would scorn to name to you. Now go!" José sank exhausted on the bench, while Daniel, obedient to his orders, hurried away.

Nobody had interrupted the dialogue, for it had all passed in a few seconds of time, and José soon recovered sufficiently to say in a melancholy tone: "I beg the pardon of you all, for such words and behavior in your presence; but it was impossible to let the fellow go without a word. If I had not called him then he would have slipped off without letting any one know!"

"How did you know that he went to La Bienvenida, brother?" Petra asked.

"Because Diego, who went with him, came and told me all about it this morning. He, poor fellow, is full of remorse, although he took only the part Daniel did in the affair, and had done his best, Sunday morning, to persuade some of the

others to give up the whole thing. He will not tell the names of any of them, however, and I did not urge him, for I am sick almost to death of all this." The poor fellow did indeed look so, as he leaned his head with closed eyes against his step-mother's shoulder for a moment. Then he roused himself, suddenly, and began speaking again earnestly:

"Daniel is weak, pitifully weak, and I am glad enough to have him gone. He was always so in our childhood together; you remember, Petra, how deceitful he was and sly. But he will soon be gone, and there will be an end of him, until he comes again. It was about Diego that I wished to speak to you, Mr. Richards, as I have already said to the señorita. He tells me that there is a general feeling of great sorrow among the men who took part in the mob Sunday night, and that if they only dared to confess their part in it they would be glad to come to us and beg forgiveness. He says that there are still some men and women who continue very bitter,—old Juana among them I judge,—but he knows even those to be very thoroughly cowed. And the idea has come to me—ah, the señorita has guessed it!" he added, with a brighter smile than had been seen on his face since that last Sunday morning.

"The church!" exclaimed Mary, softly, grasping one of Raquel's hands.

"Yes, that is it," José assented. "If you, Mr.

Richards, think it a wise time to act now, I had thought it might be well to invite all the men to meet us here and to ask all who feel willing to do so to offer their services in renovating the little church out there and completing it for our own mission church. What do you say?"

"I think it a very good plan, indeed, Jose," Mr. Richards replied, thoughtfully. "You will offer them regular wages, of course; and those who do not accept will be afraid to oppose, I firmly believe."

"And then," added Miss Summers, "it may relieve some of those wretched men who are really sorry for what they have done and are afraid to say so, and we shall all be drawn more closely together by the work. What do you say, dear Raquel?"

"That it shall be as all of you decide," the woman replied, quickly and sadly. The shadow brought into her life as a consequence in part of her own act, would never be entirely lifted, although she knew that if it was all to be done over again, her decision would be the same. That afternoon was fixed upon for the conference of the ranch and the little party separated.

The young missionary and her companions were glad to stretch their limbs and warm their chilled feet with a bracing walk across the three miles of prairie to El Porvenir. Though the sun was warm, the breeze was strong and fresh, and they

all enjoyed exchanging for a while the saddened atmosphere of the Vera house for the glad, free air of the plain.

Miss Summers told them of her adventure in the storm on that same road with Captain Daniel, and of her refuge in the chapel tower.

"What a little coward he looked just now when José was pitching into him," said Roger Douglas, with a laugh. "Of course I understood very little of what was said, but the little fellow turned quite yellow under his soldier-cap."

"José thinks he has been flirting with the pretty child Angela Vera, whom I used to pet years ago when I first began coming to the ranch," remarked Mr. Richards. "What do you think of it, Miss Summers? Has the girl lost her heart to him?"

"Not to Daniel; no, indeed!" Miss Summers replied.

"To whom then?" in some surprise.

"I think she likes José. Now she fears that he will not like her since she has had small-pox and has lost much of her beauty."

"They are first cousins," remarked Mr. Richards; "for Ignacio and Eduardo were brothers. We must look for another wife for José. Who shall it be, Miss Mary; any one at the ranch?"

"José would perhaps like best to choose for himself," suggested Roger, dryly. "I should, I am sure."

"Then we will leave it to him," said Mr.

Richards, as if with an air of relief. "No doubt he can best suit himself. Only look," he added, with a swift change of the subject, "and see those cloud shadows on the mountain sides. I think I never saw the mountains so blue as they are to-day; and farther on, is there not?—yes, there is *snow* on the Buena Vista peak!"

And so they strolled along, playing bo-peep with the inquisitive but cowardly little prairie dogs, chatting and laughing, and indulging in one of those free and careless hours so much relished by the care-worn missionary on a foreign field.

José meanwhile sat alone in the court-yard, while the women of the house went about preparing dinner for their guests. Their hearts were heavy, and no songs issued from the kitchen to-day. Little Benjamin, oppressed by the gloom of the place and missing his old father's caresses, strolled past his silent brother and out at the gates to find some cheerful little playfellow.

Refugio, sitting on a low stool at Mary's door, was busily sewing, hushing, remorsefully, the song that rose every few moments to her lips. The song was in her heart, but sadness for her friends was there too, and "How happy are they who the Saviour obey" seemed a sentiment that was almost a mockery in view of the sorrow that might follow such obedience. Her sweet young face grew very grave as she bent over her work, puzzling herself with this thought, and she was quite unconscious

of the pretty picture she made as she sat there. The dark-blue *rebozo* had fallen from her head, which was now covered with short, shining waves of black hair; the liquid, black eyes were invisible as she bent them upon her work, but long lashes swept her round, olive cheek, and her lips were as red as twin cherries. Presently her hands dropped upon her lap, and she leaned back with a sigh.

José had been watching her for a while, idly at first, as he sat helpless in his father's old arm-chair on the other side of the court; then he grew interested as he realized the beauty of the girl and noted the intent expression of her face. He recalled the wan, emaciated little creature who had lifted great, appealing eyes in such surprise at every kind word when she had first come to San Bernabé. She had since proved herself a most winning, affectionate girl, and even Petra seemed to have long since forgotten that she had not always belonged to the house. When she sighed, José started from his reverie.

"What is the matter, Cuca?" he asked. "Why are you sighing?" His tone was as caressing as if he was addressing Benjamin or some other little child. Refugio only smiled, then sighed again as she took up her work.

"Are you so very busy, Cuca?" José then asked. "I am very thirsty, and as I have no arms now, I may die of thirst sitting here while the others are

busy in the kitchen, unless you will get me some water." He smiled ruefully as he spoke, and Refugio gladly hastened to the well to draw it fresh for him.

"It is very lonely for you, sitting here," she said, after he had drunk from the tin dipper she held to his lips.

"Then bring your stool over here, and talk to me," he suggested. "You can sew at the same time."

"May I, Petra?" she asked, as the woman appeared at the kitchen door.

"May you what, Cuquita?"

"Come over here and sit by Don José, and talk to him; he is so lonely!"

"Why yes, silly child! Of course you may amuse José, poor fellow."

Then she carried her stool and her work and sat down not far from José's feet.

"Now you will tell me why you were sighing just now, little one," he said, watching the steady, brown fingers as they stitched away. The fingers were not so white and pink-tipped as the young missionary's, but they were just as shapely, and the plump hand was even smaller than Miss Summers'.

When Refugio confided to him her puzzle suggested by the hymn, José looked grave.

"You and I are only little children yet," he replied, after thinking a moment. "And I suppose

we ought not to try to understand all the hard things. We are all sad here to-day, Cuca, but I believe that in a sense we are really happier than we have been for a long time. What do you think?"

"I know what you mean, and that is what gives the look to your face, which is not like what it was, Don José, before you went to La Providencia with the Señorita María. I think I also feel it a little, in my heart," she ended, timidly.

"I am sure you do, dear child," José answered. "I know that it sometimes must take great confidence in him to believe that God is doing just the very best thing for us when it may seem to us the worst. But I think we must trust him, after all, Cuca; and then I am sure that we ought to be willing to suffer if it is for the good of his cause among our people. So I think you may sing your hymn, even to-day, Cuca."

The tears were dropping from her eyes upon her work, as José finished speaking, and his heart warmed toward her whom he was comforting with his own comfort.

"How wonderful it is!" she exclaimed, lifting her brimming eyes to José; "I thought once that I could never love any one so well as the Señorita María, and now I know that I love the Lord just as well."

José was silent then, and they sat thus until Petra called them in to their early dinner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CONFERENCE AT THE BARN.

With well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.—*1 Peter 2 : 15.*

"I have news of the priest Esteban, José," Mr. Richards whispered, as he took his seat by the side of the latter that afternoon on the bench where they had rested in the morning.

"And what has become of him, señor?" José asked, frowning. The men and women of the ranch were beginning to come together in the square before the barn, for word had soon traveled, from house to house, that José wished to speak to as many as would gather at the appointed hour. He dreaded the interview, for he was weak and nervous from his wounds, and his heart was sore, and the mention of the priest now roused in his breast such bitterness of feeling that he found it hard to control his voice.

Must he forgive this man whose bad influence among the people had led to such disastrous results in their peaceful little community? There was no time to settle this question then, however, for Mr. Richards continued speaking.

"Juan Gutierrez, in El Porvenir, told me this

morning that it is rumored from S——that the priest has gone over to the United States. It is given out that he has been sent to San Antonio, Texas, on a mission of importance for the church. I do not think we need fear ever seeing him again about San Bernabé. When such men as Don Gregorio and your nephew, the captain, were his allies, he would fear to return here."

"I only wish he would return," murmured José; two red spots were burning on his pale cheeks, and his mood was entirely changed from what it had been in the morning, as he had talked with Refugio in the court.

The sight of the men, some slouching with feigned carelessness toward the well, other approaching a little nearer the bench where he sat, and wearing the flush of shame and dread upon their faces, roused all the sternness in his nature, as he saw before him the murderers of aged and helpless innocence.

The men were afraid to stay away, partly because they feared that their absence would seem like an admission of guilt, and partly because they had inherited several generations of respect and even reverence for the head of the ranch community. All looked to José, involuntarily, as the successor of his father, although there had been as yet no general meeting of the family in the present strained condition of the family relations.

Many had come from a strong curiosity to know

what José could have to say to them, and soon after four o'clock the open space was nearly filled with quiet groups of waiting hearers.

José and Mr. Richards were joined by the rest of the household, and Miss Summers sat close at Raquel's side, grasping the woman's hand with her own, beneath the black shawl which covered the latter's head and shoulders.

José arose, and steadying himself by leaning with his back against the *adobe* wall of the barn, began to speak a little feebly, yet with much meaning.

Many hearts swelled with sympathy at the sight of the strong young man in his weakness and pain.

"I shall not make a long address," he began, "for there is not much to say. There is no need to recount to any the events of the past few days. Many doubtless, know much more about them than I do." Some heads sank lower as he paused for a moment. "This is not a court of justice," he continued; "nor am I your judge. You have a greater than I who will make wiser judgment of the crimes committed here last Sunday night, than I could do. Of course, I know certain ones among you who are my friends, and I am aware that there are others who are entirely guiltless of any share in what has been done. It would not be difficult to call the names of those who were foremost in the affair, after their leaders,

Padre Esteban and Don Gregorio. I could even go among you now, I have little doubt, and lay my finger here and there, upon such and such a man and say, 'This man, perhaps, was my father's murderer, for he was among the others, and no one knows that it was not his stone which struck him down.' I shall not do this, however. As you may know, the mayor of La Providencia has been notified of your doings, and his men will be among us to-morrow, perhaps, as they have not come to-day. What you do not know is that I shall not aid them in their search for the criminals, further than to state the simple facts of the case, as I shall swear to no names. You must look out for yourselves!"

"Ah, our good José, our kind José!" exclaimed several women's voices.

"No!" he cried sternly and hoarsely. "Do you think, men, that I would stand in the way of justice being done to the *real* criminals, those cowards, Gregorio Nuñez and Esteban Lopez? The first is in the hands of God's justice now, and we could add nothing to his punishment. That same Hand will be over the movements of the priest Esteban, on whichever side of the Rio Grande he may be found. But, I am willing to give you all a chance to prove your sorrow for the calamities you have caused, and to prove your real fidelity to us, which has never before failed. My friends," José was softening now, and the red

flush died out of his cheeks, and left them very pale, "I hope we understand each other now, and that we shall begin all over again our lives together. There must be peace among us, or we shall end our days in remorse and unhappiness. Each one shall worship God according to his own conscience, but this shall not prevent us who think differently in this matter from many of you, from trying to persuade you to know the truth as it is in Jesus. What do you say, men and women?" He paused breathless, and drank eagerly from the glass of water which Mr. Richards put to his lips. He shook his head, however, when the latter advised him to rest awhile before continuing his speech.

One man stood out from the rest, and with real humility of manner replied to José's last appeal:

"We have been talking and thinking about this matter of religion, Don José, and most of us have agreed, since Sunday night, that every man has a right to think for himself in this, and to accept or reject this new doctrine which the *Americanos* have brought to us, and that each one has an equal right to preach and teach what he thinks is the truth. Am I right, fellows?" he asked, turning around upon the crowd of listening faces. This man was Diego, who had already spoken with José.

"Yes, yes!" came from many of the men, and from a few of the women, while all looked amenable to reason, if only a few spoke.

"And we'll take care of all those who want to interfere with the Señorita María in her work," said the deep voice of a man, who stood a little away from the groups, and had been looking with thoughtful sadness upon the black-robed figures of Petra and Doña Raquel.

All eyes turned in amazement toward the point from which the voice proceeded.

"Don Daniel Vera!" whispered Miss Summers to Roger Douglas, who stood at her side. "Doña Rosa's husband, and I suppose this is the first time he has ever raised his voice contrary to his wife's opinions!"

"Thank you, brother," returned José, with a grave smile, "and thank you too, friends. Now, I have something else to tell you, and I beg you to hear me to the end, before forming your decision upon my proposal to you. You all know the history of the unfinished chapel over there," pointing to the gray walls showing through a gap in the houses. "We have now decided to complete the building immediately, and to dedicate it to the worship of our Lord Jesus Christ. It will require some pulling down and rebuilding before the work can be much advanced," he continued, not heeding the glances of mingled interest and consternation exchanged among his hearers; "but with a large force of workmen in this beautiful weather, I think the church will be ready for use by Easter. Now, hear my proposal: every man

of you who is willing to help us go on with the work will receive the usual wages per day. You will thus be helping to support your families, while there is little to be done in the fields, and you will give good proofs of your friendship for me in aiding me in this. Those who are willing to go to work to-morrow on the chapel walls, may raise their right hands to signify their assent, and then after Mr. Richards has spoken a few words to you, I hope you will come up one by one, here to Señor Douglas, who will enroll your names for me in my book, so that I may know on whom I may depend for the work. I do not wish to send to S—— for masons and carpenters, friends. Now!"

Every one raised his hand at the same instant, for José's mild, yet stirring words had bred an enthusiasm in every breast, not for the religion which José represented, but for José himself, whom every one in the ranch admired and loved.

José bowed his head in gratified recognition of the demonstration, and then sank half exhausted to his seat.

There was not the cheering that there would have been but for the peculiar circumstances attending the case, but animation beamed from every eye, and a feeling of content filled many a heart at this opportunity for reinstatement in their friend's good graces.

Then Mr. Richards stepped forward and ad-

dressed them in a few simple words, closing with:

"It is growing late now, and there is but one thing more I wish to tell you before you come to give your names to Señor Douglas here. There will be a short prayer meeting in Doña Raquel's *sala* to-night at eight o'clock. She wishes to invite all of you to be present."

With this the conference ended to the satisfaction of most who had attended. Of course there were still left those who would give only hand—not heart—service in the building undertaken by them, and there were some dissatisfied spirits turning restlessly upon hard beds that night; but a general spirit of peace was diffused through the ranch and many firm resolves were made for future good behavior.

The prayer meeting at night was well attended, and though there were neither hymn books nor organ, the singing was very full and sweet. The tears flowed from Doña Raquel's eyes as she and Petra stood with the rest of the newly baptized members to receive the hand of fellowship given by Mr. Richards first, and then by all the other members of the little church.

As Miss Summers lightly touched José's right hand, as it half rested in the sling, she noticed an expression of deep melancholy in his eyes which she could not understand.

As the congregation dispersed at the end of the

service, he came over to her side and begged that he might speak with her a few moments in private. She knew that only great necessity could induce José to make such a request now, so she willingly assented and invited him to come to her room. When the court was emptied at last José followed her, then began to speak abruptly, still standing.

"Sit down, José," she said. "I know that you must be fatigued. Is your arm troubling you? I feared it would be worse after the excitement of to-day."

"Yes, it is very painful, I believe," then he laughed slightly; "rather, I know it is. But it is not of that I wish to speak to you. I have come to you because I think you will understand me better than any one else. Señorita, I am a hypocrite, and I had no right to stand there to-night and be received into the fellowship of the church.

"What can you mean, José?" Mary asked, kindly. She saw that he was suppressing some excitement under a forced quiet of tone.

"I mean that I cannot forgive that coward Esteban for the ruin he has brought to us," he replied, fiercely. "And is that the way a Christian ought to feel?"

"No," Mary replied, gently. "You know our Master's will about our enemies. He prayed for his when they had done all they could, taking from him his reputation and then his life."

"But I am not God, and I cannot act as God does."

"Can you pray for this priest, José?" Mary asked. "Do you not wish that he may repent of his wickedness and become converted!"

"Yes," José replied, slowly, "I suppose I could pray for him. I would not wish the fellow to die as he is, I am sure. But that is not the trouble; I ought to forgive him whether he repents or not. As a Christian, I ought to feel toward him as I did before I found him to be the rascal he is, but I *cannot.*"

"Does God do so? Does he forgive the sinner, before he shows some sign of repentance and desire for reinstatement? I think not, José; and I do not believe that we are called upon to do more than God does in the matter of forgiveness."

"Do you think then, señorita, that I need not try and forgive him?"

"You *must* try to forgive him, José, in so far that you will be able to pray that God will change his heart, and that he may be brought to ask forgiveness from God; you must get rid of your anger against him, and learn to think of him with calmness and with a desire to help him to be a better man, if an opportunity shall present itself. The Bible is very clear on *this* point I think, and I believe that this is what is meant by 'Forgive your enemies.' As to the reinstatement of the man into his former position in your esteem, before your

eyes were opened to his character, that is as yet an impossibility, and is not required of you. Perhaps, however, you would better talk with Mr. Richards about it, as I do not wish to mislead you, and it is a difficult subject."

"Thank you, señorita, for what you have said, and I do not need to speak to Mr. Richards. You have made it clearer already. I do want to do what is right, and I shall try to feel differently about the fellow."

"And God will surely help you to a right forgiveness of him in time, José, if you will ask him to do so, and if you will be very careful to cast out all the ill will that you have felt for him."

"I shall indeed try to do so. I do not know how I can ever thank you for the help you have always given me, señorita," he added, as he arose to go. "You are going away to-morrow, and it may be a long while before you return, and we shall miss you at every step; but I, for one, shall try to do my best, remembering you."

"And José," Mary began, after hesitating a moment, "I want you to help me about something."

"Only tell me what it is, señorita."

"I am leaving my Refugio, you know, with Petra. She will be good to her; but I want you for a kind of elder brother for her, who will watch over her a little. She is a woman now, though she is so small, and already one or two young fellows have begun to——."

"You may trust her to me, señorita," José exclaimed, hastily; "no one shall speak with her while you are gone. You may trust me."

"I do not mean for you to go as far as that," and Mary smiled into his earnest face; "just watch over her a little. I know she will give you no trouble, as she is a sweet, docile child."

They parted then, and Mary called Refugio to help her pack her small trunk for the journey next day; for Mr. Richards had at length prevailed upon her to give the children a longer vacation and to return with him to S——, for the Christmas holidays at least. She was not consciously ill, but even her strong health was suffering from the long strain of nursing and excitement, and her sleep had grown fitful, while her appetite had vanished, and at length all urged her to yield to Mr. Richards' advice. So she and Refugio had their last evening chat together for several weeks, and many bright tears were folded away within the beloved señorita's dresses, as Refugio laid them in the trunk.

The same evening Mr. Richards made the hearts of the Vera family glad by the promise of a permanent pastor from among the mission circle at S—— for the little church, as soon as the new building should be completed, and he communicated to them Miss Summers' wish to give the sum necessary for building a comfortable little parsonage near the church.

"She wishes me to say, however," continued Mr. Richards, "that *she* would like to continue living with you as long as you have room for her, whoever may come here from S—— as pastor. She will be happier with you."

"God grant that she may live under my roof all her life!" said Raquel, fervently. And Petra's contented expression at the news found a reflection in José's expressive countenance. Content and peace had returned to his heart, and the missionary wondered at the new beauty, which Refugio had already noticed.

He then expressed to them his intention of sending immediately a faithful and experienced native worker, who should live among them, and keep the little flock together and minister to its needs.

"Mother is anxious that we should have a prayer service here every night, senor," José said, as they were separating. "It may be that while the people are a little softened there may be some impression for good made upon them. Just among the brethren of the church we might carry on the services for a week or so, until help comes."

There were many thankful hearts that night in the ranch, as the moon shed her soft light over the plain, and sleep was sounder and sweeter than for many nights past.

CHAPTER XXV.

FROM THE RANCH TO THE CITY.

I rejoice in being exactly what I am—a creature capable of loving God, and who, as long as God lives, must be happy. I get up and look for a while out of the window, and gaze at the moon and stars, the work of an Almighty hand. I think of the grandeur of the universe, and then sit down and think myself one of the happiest beings in it.—*A poor Methodist woman, eighteenth century.*

THE diligence between La Providencia and S——, always put up for the night at San Bernabé, and continued its way the next day toward S——, where it arrived before midnight. As this diligence was apt to be crowded with *rancheros*, and as it was a most uncomfortable and dirty vehicle, Mr. Richards had arranged with José that they should be sent to S—— in the Vera coach, drawn by four stout mules.

The eastern sky still showed no signs of day-break, and the stars were brightly shining, when the last farewells were said the next morning, and Mary was lifted into the high, old-fashioned coach by two pairs of strong arms. The two gentlemen followed her, the coach door was closed with a sharp bang, the driver cracked his long whip, the mules clattered their hoofs upon the paving stones of the court, the wide gates were held open, and

the coach was driven with a flourish through the street and out upon the prairie road. Early as it was, many of the ranch people had risen to "speed their parting guests," and the coach proceeded amid cheers and hearty *adios!*

Petra had arranged the back seat of the coach with pillows and shawls, and Miss Summers, more willingly than she would have owned, yielded to Mr. Richards' commands and snuggled down to rest again, as soon as they had left the ranch behind them.

The weird light of the "wee sma' hours" rested over mountain and plain, and the cool dews of the night held in check the heavy, white dust of the road. The air was so cold that it was necessary to close the window on one side of the coach, and the three occupants were well wrapped in cloaks and shawls. The driver and another man with him on the box were muffled in red blankets up to their ears, and thus, in perfect silence for the first hour or two, they proceeded at a rapid trot along the level road.

Mr. Richards nodded and dozed in his corner, for he was too much accustomed to rough journeyings by night and day to be easily deprived of his morning nap, when given the slightest opportunity for indulging in one. Roger Douglas, at his side, soon followed his example and slept sweetly, with his head resting in the corner against the cushioned back of the seat.

For a long while the young teacher lay wide awake, utterly peaceful and at rest. She realized that there was to be no more responsibility upon her shoulders for several weeks, and her tired frame yielded to the delicious sense of restfulness caused by this remembrance. There was nothing to be seen from her pillow but the multitude of stars in the dark sky and the far-away dim outline of the mountain peaks in the east. Then the morning star slowly descended within her horizon and beamed upon her through the coach window, fading gradually before the coming light of day. Refugio, Petra, José, the ranch, her companions in the coach, all, little by little, slipped away out of her memory, a mistiness seemed to gather about the world outside, framed by the little square window in the coach door, and then she fell asleep.

When Roger Douglas, an hour or two later, recovered himself after an unusually hard bump against his corner, he was surprised to find that he had been asleep. The birds and prairie dogs were awake and busy about their morning occupations, and a clear, rosy light flooded the sky and plain. Mr. Richards still nodded and shifted his head uncomfortably, yet still dreamed on.

Mr. Douglas started with wonder and delight as he let his gaze return to Miss Summers and rest there where she lay quietly sleeping in front of him. A sudden turn in the road had brought her face to face with the pink glow in the east,

and her face was bathed in the lovely light of the morning sky. A tender, unearthly beauty illumined her features, which had grown thin and sharp during the anxieties of the past days and nights, and Roger could not take his eyes from her face, while a deep tenderness filled his heart as he watched her in her helpless unconsciousness.

Another lurch of the vehicle roused the two sleepers, however, and the sleep thus roughly banished returned no more. They straightened themselves, laughing, and Mary begged to be allowed to sit up. Then all found themselves very hungry, and on inquiry, Mr. Richards learned from the driver that half an hour more would bring them to a spring in a sheltered place where a fire might be kindled.

They were skirting the hills now, and before they reached the spring, the road had begun to ascend, entering the pass through the mountains. The sun was streaming over the tree tops crowning the mountains, when the coach stopped and the driver opened the door. There in the cañon, however, it was still cold and dusky, and the fire hastily kindled by the two serving men was very agreeable to the chilled and cramped passengers when they alighted and stood warming their hands and feet at the cheery blaze. Dried *mesquite* branches and roots made a red-hot mass of coals after the blaze of the lighter wood had died out, and they gathered around their improvised hearth

and ate toasted crackers and cheese and drank milk, heated over the coals, until they were greatly refreshed.

The scene around them was wild, and would grow wilder as they advanced through the mountains. Here and there patches of mountain pines lifted their sturdy branches above the gray rock; but the mountains were mostly bare and rocky, and the road through the cañon was cut at the foot of great rugged cliffs, while steep precipices fell away on the other side below as the road climbed higher and higher. On the other side of the ridge the prairie rolled again, but it would be evening before this level could be reached.

A little stream trickled down along its rocky pathway from the icy summit above, and the travelers, after eating, washed their hands and faces in luxury in a little pool, whose edges were fringed by the hardy mountain fern.

"We have the whole day before us," Mr. Richards remarked, as the lunch hamper was repacked and they were about to re-enter the coach, "and as much of the night as we need. Suppose we walk on a little, while the day is fresh and until we are tired, then we shall enjoy riding so much the more. Come, Miss Mary, are you equal to a climb?"

"Indeed I am," she replied. "I feel all made over already."

So they left the coach behind, slowly and care-

fully rounding the sharp turns as the road ascended, and the three pedestrians stepped out briskly in advance. For an hour or so they walked, until the sun, risen higher now, poured down his light and heat into the pass and they were glad to re-enter the coach, which had passed them and stood waiting for them at some distance ahead.

The forenoon passed pleasantly in the coach, with singing of songs and hymns and a great deal of talk, both serious and gay. Here and there, where the road was narrowest and most difficult, they passed rude crosses erected over a heap of stones by the wayside, and Mr. Richards explained that these marked the places of some murder when robberies and murder had been rife through the mountains only a few years before.

"The brigands are disappearing from the mountain defiles now," he went on; "but even now I should not like to ride alone in the night along this deserted road. Here, quick!" he added, thrusting his pistol into Mary's hand, "shoot! There he is skulking behind that great rock. Stop for a moment, driver."

Mary, greatly startled, and having not the least idea of her intended prey, fired blindly; the echo from the pistol shot reverberated from side to side of the ravine, which had opened wider at this point, and the next instant they saw the lank, yellow body of a wolf skulking behind the rocks and bushes.

"Shoot again! Quick!" Mr. Richards cried; and now with a steadier hand, Mary pulled the trigger, and to her great astonishment the wolf dropped dead, and came tumbling down a short way, and then was caught and held by the underbrush.

One of the Mexicans ran to the spot, and after a few moments returned to the coach window in great glee, dragging the body of the great, gaunt creature with both hands.

"She gave it to him right through the head, señores," he cried, enthusiastically. "What a wonder to see a señorita bring down a wolf!" Mary shuddered at the sight of the ugly fangs projecting from the grinning, bloody jaws, and could not be induced to touch the bristling, tawny skin of the beast.

"I shall have the hide tanned for you, Miss Mary," Mr. Richards declared, "and you shall use it in the schoolroom to keep your feet warm. Take it away now," he added to the man, who still stood grinning with approbation of the young señorita's feat.

Man and wolf mounted to the front seat, and they drove on again through the changing lights and shadows of the way.

At noon they rested for an hour, after eating dinner, and then they pushed on again. They had begun the descent toward the plain on the other side when a sudden, quick shower overtook

them, while far below them the plains stretched in unclouded sunshine.

By-and-by, as the shadows lengthened and the ravine again grew dim in the fading afternoon light, the road gradually neared the level of the plain, until finally it brought them out upon the open prairie. Here, driving was more comfortable, and the mules trotted swiftly, not away from the mountains, but along the road skirting them, for many miles. Once they crossed the same river which Mary and José had forded on their way to La Providencia, and which had here found the level plain.

The banks were green with water cress, and in some shallow places the surface of the water was entirely hidden by the tender green of the plant.

Nothing further occurred to break the monotony of the journey, and night had long fallen over mountain and plain when the coach began to rattle past scattered *adobe* houses, and long, blank walls of *corral* and orchard, in the suburbs of the city of S——.

Then with much needless cracking of the whip, and at a headlong speed, they rushed over the cobble-stones of the streets, and finally drew up in front of the heavy iron gates of the mission school for girls.

A month later, two figures strolled beneath the gnarled old trees of the Alameda, or public wooded

park of S——, paused beside the brimming basin of the fountain, and stood for a moment in earnest conversation.

They were Mary Summers and Roger Douglas, and she was just promising to be his wife. It was the eve of her return to San Bernabé, and he could no longer wait to tell her of the love that had been in his heart since that evening when they had first met underneath the flaring torchlight in the market place of La Providencia.

"But you know, Mr. Douglas," she was saying, as she drew off her glove and dipped her bare fingers into the water, "I cannot leave my people in San Bernabé. I do not believe that my work there is done."

"Nor do I," he replied, earnestly. "Will there not be room for us both in San Bernabé?"

"You will go there also?" she asked, in surprise.

"Why, yes, if you do, my darling. But not yet, of course," he added, hastily, as she shook her head. "You have not then heard of Mr. Richards' plan? It is not likely that he would have spoken of it to you, as it concerns my own plans. I am to be pastor of the San Bernabé church, Miss Mary, and you are to be the pastor's wife. Do you like our plan?"

But Mary would not answer that question just then, and they turned from the fountain to wander again down the long avenues.

"You have not yet told me what you think of our plan," Roger persisted after a little; "and I have been wondering if you approve of it, if you would not rather that we should be married out there, among your—our people. Mr. Richards and several of us have promised to go out to the dedication of the church, you know. Will it be too soon in April, dear?"

"How many questions you ask!" Mary said, smiling into his eager hazel eyes. "And I am sure that Mr. Richards knew that there was nothing else to be done but to appoint you as pastor of the church," she added, mischievously, "for he knows that I would not leave those people!"

"And will you be ready for me in April?" he asked, anxiously. "Of course I shall see you several times before then, for I shall run out occasionally to see how the building is progressing."

"Do you not think that José can attend to the building, Mr. Douglas? He is very energetic, and a fine manager of his men." This was said with more mischief still in the happy blue eyes.

"Yes, I do," Douglas replied. "So I shall go only to see my dear love, if that will suit you better; and somehow the days will pass until April comes!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

BEAUTY FOR ASHES.

What inexpressible joy for me . . . to feel that even when the day itself passes, I shall see that the night itself only unveils new worlds of light; and to know that if I could unwrap fold after fold of God's universe, I should only unfold more and more blessing, and see deeper and deeper into the love which is at the heart of all—*Elisabeth Charles.*

THE months passed slowly, and even April came and went before the San Bernabé church was ready for use, although the weather continued fine during most of the time and the work was hindered very little on account of occasional rains.

A snug little parsonage was also built near the site of the old mission schoolhouse, and in consequence of Miss Summers' plans, the plain *adobe* cottage was made a little more comfortable and convenient than the usual Mexican home.

The month of May passed with its hot winds and storms of dust and sand from the prairie; and June came before everything was ready at the ranch for the coach load of guests from S——, who were expected to attend the dedication of the church.

One Friday afternoon late in June, the church

stood all complete, a gleaming white landmark in the midst of the green plain. In the stone tower, at one corner, a sweet-toned bell was hung, a present that had come from several children's societies in "the States." Its voice had not yet been heard, for its first stroke was to be sounded at ten o'clock the next morning to invite all the ranch to the dedication services. A new organ, also silent, was within the walls, and only the soft voices of the evening world outside were heard in the quiet place as José, a short while before the coach was expected, closed and locked the great double doors in the tower.

He hurried along the broad path that had been opened from the ranch to the church doors, and mounted his gray horse which Antonio held ready saddled and bridled for him in the road. He was to ride out upon the plain and meet the company of guests and accompany them to the house.

There was still no sign of the coach upon the long stretch of road beyond when Mary, Petra, and Refugio came out of the Vera court and shaded their eyes from the sunlight, as they scanned the road in vain.

"It has been so hot to-day, Mariquita, that they must have rested all the middle of the day and will come on in the cool of the evening," Petra said, enjoying Mary's eagerness and the flush of her cheek.

Every one knew before now for whom the pretty

cream-colored cottage was intended, though no one, except the immediate Vera family, knew just when their loved señorita was to become their no less beloved señora.

"To think that *we* made the trip in one day," grumbled Mary, to herself, in English, smiling, however; "and those lazy folks must needs take two days for it, and a night besides! Camping out is fun, sometimes, but I know that *I* should not wait for a coach full of dawdlers if I had a horse and could ride——"

"See that horse coming flying toward us," Refugio exclaimed; "what a cloud of dust he is bringing along with him! It cannot be Don José returning."

It was not José; and Petra and Refugio returned alone to the house, leading a weary and dusty horse, while Mary and the horse's rider followed at a little distance.

The next day, when the first clear notes of the chapel's bell sounded an invitation and a welcome to all within hearing of its ringing tones, the whole ranch began to empty itself, and groups of men, women, and children hurried through the heat to the cool shade within the chapel walls.

There was room for all who came inside, while many hovered about the door and windows who were not willing to enter.

Doña Isabel, with Angela, occupied one of the front seats with Raquel and her household. Mar-

tina was there, with the sad-faced Luisa at her side, both grieving in their hearts over the loss of their boys, yet filled with a joy that sorrow could not take away.

The school children had been trained by their teacher to sing a song of welcome to the congregation, and their young voices filled the little church with melody. Then followed other hymns and several addresses from the missionaries present, and just when the many little ones present were beginning to grow restive, Mr. Richards brought the services to a close, with the announcement that the new pastor of the church, their friend Mr. Douglas, would be formally presented to them at the evening service.

Then, when all were expecting the benediction, he stepped quietly down from the little pulpit, and stood for a moment on the lowest step, while Miss Summers left her place at the organ and was joined by Roger Douglas amid an intense silence. They stood before the minister, and were quietly married, while the audience stared in open-eyed astonishment. Then Mr. Richards, in a trembling voice, called for a blessing from God upon the little church, which had again found a home, and upon the two who were to be the shepherds of the little flock, and who had just been made one.

With joyful hearts the whole congregation escorted the bridegroom and his bride along the road to the little parsonage, after the services were

concluded, and the rest of the day was given up to a quiet enjoyment of a holiday.

Lunch was served for the missionaries in Mrs. Douglas' bright little dining room, and a prettier hostess and happier host were never seen.

During the afternoon, while all sat merrily talking in the *sala*, Refugio came in and whispered to the bride that old Juana's grandchild, the poor, diseased boy, was dying, and that the woman begged that the young missionary should be sent for. The old crone had grown very feeble during the past months, and Miss Summers had gone to see her often, as she lay in her miserable hut upon a sack filled with straw. Her hatred for the young missionary had slowly disappeared before the constant acts of kindness she had been able to show her in her sickness, and she was as eager now for her visits as she had before opposed them.

Slipping away from her friends, the happy young missionary hurried to the house where the miserable little life of the sick child was fast going out. She knew that nothing better could come to the idiot boy than the end that was approaching, yet she sympathized with the helpless old woman's distress over her grandchild, who was the only creature left to love her in her unlovable old age.

She stayed with her until the last struggle on the little pallet was over, and the small shrunken body lay still. She talked with the weeping grandmother, and tried to gently lead her to the com

forts offered by the gospel to just such forsaken creatures as she was, but it was difficult to know whether any effect was produced upon the aged mind and heart. She had to leave her, finally, and return to her husband.

Again the bell rang out upon the summer air, and again the church filled with people, who listened with intense attention to the words of the gospel preached to them.

The next day was the Lord's Day, and Mr. Douglas himself preached to his people. What matter if his words were brief and halting, in the strange, difficult tongue, when his heart was full to overflowing with love for God and for his hearers? They understood what he tried to say, and they loved him for his brave earnestness.

Angela Vera had come, long before, according to Isabel's promise, to spend a while with her friend, now Mrs. Douglas, as soon as she was able to leave home, and the latter was touched at the deep affection the girl showed for her. The old bright, vivid beauty had not returned, but there was a sweet earnestness impressed upon her face which made it more attractive than before, and Mary often wondered how José could resist her new charms. But when she saw that Angela could not forget that José had once seemed to care for her, and that the color was not returning to her cheeks, she had begged Doña Isabel to let her daughter go for a year or two to the college in

S——. There she could study music, and learn that there were many things in the world for an earnest woman's heart and hands to do.

So, when the party returned to S—— after the dedication, Angela went with them.

The new pastor was soon second only to his wife in the hearts of his people, and his upright Christian life made a deep impression for good upon those also who were not yet of the "fold."

One evening, when the young teacher had been married several weeks, she was sitting in her airy hallway, waiting tea for her husband, who had gone to visit the church-members living in El Porvenir. She was sewing busily, and singing as she sewed. Refugio was away, and she was beginning to feel a little lonely, when she looked up and saw José standing at the door. He entered at her invitation, and began frankly to tell her the object of his visit as soon as he was seated.

"Have I taken good care of Refugio, for you, señorita?" he asked. "All these months I have not forgotten that I was her elder brother, and I have kept off many a bold fellow from speaking with her. Have I done right in watching over her?"

"Quite right, José," Mary replied. "I knew that I could trust you!"

"How far can you trust me, señorita?" he questioned. "I am tired of being 'elder brother'

now, and I have come to ask you to give her to me for my wife. You must know that I love her, even though once I was—well, a little crazed I think." He blushed and looked away from his friend's smiling face.

"You may have her, José, for I know that you love each other. God bless you both. But you must wait a year or two, my friend, for Refugio is young yet, only seventeen, and she has many things yet to learn before she should become a wife."

"I shall wait as long as you wish, señorita, if only I know that she is to be mine," he replied; and then begged that he might go to find Refugio, and tell her of his love.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A GARDEN OF GIRLS.

Behind us, behind each one of us, lie six thousand years of human effort, human conquest; before us, is the boundless Time with its as yet uncreated and unconquered continents and El Dorados, which we, even we, have to conquer, to create; and from the bosom of Eternity there shine for us celestial guiding stars.—*Thomas Carlyle.*

THOUGH it was on a hot June day when the coach containing Angela and her traveling companions drew up before the gate of the college in S——, the building and corridors were swarming with girls. In North Mexico, where the houses are chilly with their stone floors and unglazed windows, and the winters are cold, vacation is given during this season in the mission schools; and December and January are selected as the vacation months, when the empty schoolrooms and dormitories are given over to the chill dampness and sweeping draughts of wintry winds.

Work goes on all during the summer with ease, for although the sun is hot outside, within the thick walls of the Mexican houses the air is cool and pleasant.

So the school work was just at its busiest when Angela entered the broad corridors of the college

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for the first time, and took her place among the busy workers laboring there.

The situation of this mission college was a little unique, for it occupied a square all to itself, near the heart of the city, being surrounded on four sides by as many streets. The great iron gates of the hallway opened out upon a little green garden shaded by umbrella trees, and surrounded by a high iron railing. There were walks in the garden and plots of grass, and rose trees here and there. This garden was entered from the street by a narrow gate on each side.

As Angela entered the iron gates of the building, and followed the ladies and gentlemen who had brought her from San Bernabé, into the inner courtyard, she was almost overwhelmed by the vociferous welcome given them by at least fifty noisy throats inside.

As the garden outside was too public for the mission pupils to use as a playground, the great inner court and the arched corridors surrounding it were always given up to the girls for their sports and promenade.

Soon, therefore, Angela found herself surrounded by a laughing group of girls of about her own age, all of whom seemed to speak at once, and she was quite bewildered, until one of the teachers came to her rescue and carried her off to her own room.

Presently a gentle-looking child came for

Angela, and led her to a long dim dormitory lighted only by the doors opening upon the corridor and containing eight little beds.

"The Señorita Berta says that you may sleep next to me, as there is a vacant bed here," said the child; "and I will help you arrange your things when the man brings in your trunk."

When night fell at last over the little community securely shut within its stone walls, and the bell for darkness and quiet had ceased its reverberations along the empty corridors, Angela lay down upon her narrow bed, beside that of the friendly little Luz.

She had much to think about, but long before the loud whisperings from the neighboring beds were hushed in sleep, she herself had traveled far into dreamland.

The days passed swiftly after the first week or two of dreary homesickness. Surely no girls are more friendly and sympathetic than Mexican schoolgirls, and it was not long before Angela was adopted by one of her own age as "bosom friend."

Her firm friend, Mrs. Douglas, had written from San Bernabé to Miss Berta Shaw, the principal of the school, entrusting Angela to her warm, motherly heart; and the girl was examined by the teachers without delay during the first week, and assigned a place in the schoolroom.

The strict regulations of school life were at

first irksome to Angela, who had hitherto been as free as a wild bird in her own father's house. Her school days in her mountain home had ended long ago, and it was hard to come back to books and slates. But when she found that the friend of her heart was already studying English, and could even speak it intelligibly, and that the blackboard and globe exercises were like so many interesting games, she became reconciled to study, and before long ceased to murmur at her own low place in her classes. Music, even in its rudiments, was her chief joy, and she practised with almost a feverish intentness.

No one could understand so well as Mary the following letter, received from the principal of the college, written three months after Angela's entrance:

"Now that you have heard all of the harmless bits of gossip about our little mission family here, you will wish to hear about your girl, Angela Vera. In some respects, I find her one of the most interesting characters we have ever had to study here. She is an impulsive, warm-hearted child, not especially fond of books, yet passionately devoted to the piano. Her teachers in the other branches complain of listlessness occasionally in the schoolroom, and grow impatient over her 'far-seeing gaze,' as one expresses it, when her eyes should be fixed upon her geography or history. From what you have hinted to me, I think

I can understand something of this absent-mindedness, and I believe that it will eventually pass away, after a long absence from San Bernabé. On this account I think it would be well, if her parents consent, to leave her here with me during the vacation. She will be carefully shielded from all evil influences, as you know, and will become weaned from her fancy for your friend. Already she seems much happier than when she first arrived, and you may rest assured that I have laid to heart your letter of counsel with respect to Angela. She comes to me with her difficulties as naturally as a child to its mother, and I am glad to tell you that all of the ill effects of her sickness have disappeared. She is still somewhat thin, but her color is good and her skin smooth again. I think she has no idea how lovely are her short, silky rings of black hair, as she will never let herself be seen out of bed without her *rebozo* wound tightly about her head.

"You ask about her religious impressions, but I have no good news for you on that point. You know how hard it is to impress these girls with a reverence for the Bible. Angela attends chapel service morning and night, of course, with the other girls, and she is in my class in Sunday-school. I hope that before she leaves us, her heart may be touched by the Spirit of truth. We can have faith, and can work and pray, and can do no more."

One pleasant November afternoon, near the close of Angela's first session at college, the whole school was out for its weekly stroll to the old Alameda.

The long, double file of girls walked briskly through the streets from the college to the grove with all their accustomed gayety, and many a passer-by turned his head to catch a second glimpse of the bright-faced column of neatly dressed maidens. A teacher headed this long column of over a hundred, the day scholars being included in this weekly walk, and the principal brought up the rear. Every girl was bareheaded, and their little high-heeled shoes tapped lightly upon the rough cobble-stones. Two or three vendors of sweets trotted behind the ranks, carrying trays of candies and sweet buns and fruit, and all eagerly hastened toward the shade of the beautiful trees of the Alameda. This ancient grove lies just on the western edge of the city, near the suburban orchards and private gardens, and it was a relief to leave the rough-paved street and enter the cleanly swept avenues. Here the dust was laid by the hand-sprinkling of the water-carriers. Old, crumbling stone benches were built here and there under the trees, and in the center of the park there was an immense fountain basin with its rippling surface of water, like a miniature lake. The large open space around the basin was paved and surrounded by the stone seats, and this space was called the glorietta.

Toward the glorietta the teachers and girls proceeded, and here they disbanded in the midst of merry shouts and laughter. The teachers sank to rest upon the stone seats, and the vendors began to drive a lively trade over their wares. There was scarcely a girl who had not at least a *cuartilla* (three cents) to spend. By-and-by, the grove echoed from side to side with noisy games, while here and there the quieter, older girls strolled by twos and threes for cosy chats in some retired corner. There was no danger from this license given them, for the eyes of the teachers were sharp, and they had only to guard against any clandestine meetings or words between their flock and the students of the State College. These young gentlemen usually selected the afternoon of the girls' walk for their own promenade in the Alameda, and here and there down the avenues could be seen groups of black coats, as well as those more gayly colored, moving hither and thither.

The hour of recreation was drawing to a close when the principal's sharp eyes detected a couple of girls seated on a far-away bench, with a tall figure in the gown of a priest, standing before them. She was on her feet in an instant and walking hastily toward them. The girls were Angela Vera and her friend Arcadia, and both came hastily toward her as she approached, while the priest hurried away in an opposite direction.

Angela's face was livid as she met Miss Shaw, and her lips moved helplessly without the sound of a word. Arcadia held her hand and was drawing her hastily along.

"Señorita Berta," she exclaimed, in a frightened whisper, "let us go quickly. See how he has frightened Angelita. I do not know what he said, for he whispered into her ear, but Angela will tell you. Dearest Angelita, do not look so," she entreated; "he is gone—indeed I see him nowhere at all now."

Miss Shaw led them both to a seat, but soon found that she could get nothing from Angela in explanation of her fright. The girl's teeth chattered and she began to sob when Miss Shaw pressed her to answer her questions. She could only learn from Arcadia that the priest had passed them as they sat talking together, and that he had seemed to recognize Angela, had returned toward them, and had bent and whispered a few words into Angela's ear before moving on again.

The whistle was sounded as a signal for all the girls to gather again in the glorietta and form the column for the homeward march. Miss Shaw kept the two frightened girls under her own special care, and as they left the shade of the grove, forbade either of them to mention to their companions what had occurred. So the merry party walked homeward, tired and happy, and chattering like a flock of magpies all the way.

On arriving at the college, Miss Shaw carried Angela off to her room, and before many moments her tender entreaties had won from the girl what she wished to know.

Angela had a hearty fit of crying first, and when she had grown calmer and was able to speak, confessed with a hysterical laugh:

"I do not know why I was so frightened, señorita, for the padre said only one word to me. He stopped and looked into my eyes, but his eyes seemed like two sharp knives, and when he hissed '*protestante*' into my very face, I was frightened to death."

"You foolish child," the principal exclaimed; "do you not know that that is what they call us all? They can think of no epithet more insulting for us."

"Of course I know that, señorita, but I have not yet told you who it was. The Señorita María would have been frightened too, if she had seen Padre Esteban Lopez of La Providencia!"

"Indeed! Was it he? How strange that he should let himself be seen here so soon! But, seriously, Angela, you need have no fear of him. He would not dare to harm you, if it should be possible to harm one of our little doves here. We shall take care of you, child. And remember that the hated name '*protestante*,' meant for a curse upon us by the Romanists, is what I most long to call you. Some day, little girl, you will be *pro-*

testante, I hope, and then your loved Señorita María and I shall thank God for teaching you the truth. Now go quickly to your supper and say nothing about this priest to the girls. I will myself speak to Arcadia about it."

At the supper table of the missionaries that night Mr. Richards remarked, casually:

"Well, I suppose we have seen the last of that fellow Esteban Lopez, the priest, who stirred up the ranch against Miss Mary last year."

"What can you mean?" asked Miss Shaw, hastily. "Angela met him in the Alameda this afternoon, and was terribly frightened at his recognizing her and calling her a Protestant."

"Is it possible that he dared? I also saw him this afternoon, but he took pains to cross the street ahead of me and vanish within a doorway as soon as he saw me. Our consul tells me that the fellow has been ordered to Spain by the archbishop, as Esteban thinks his life is not safe in Mexico and fears that the Veras will eventually call him to account for the trouble at San Bernabé. The consul seemed to have a hazy idea of his business to Spain, but he thinks the man is to be sent as a missionary from Madrid over into Morocco. At any rate, we need not fear to see him hereabouts any more."

"Then you think I may assure Angela that he will be no longer skulking about here to frighten her? The poor child is very nervous about him."

"The consul said that Esteban was only passing through on his way to New York from Mexico City. You know the consul's wife is a Mexican and a Romanist, so he has his information from her."

It is needless to say that Angela's pillow was softer and smoother that night, for the intelligence that Padre Esteban was bound for foreign lands, than it would have been if she had had to dread the risk of meeting him at any turn.

Angela is still at school at S——, though the last vacation or two has been spent with her parents in her own home.

As she travels between S—— and La Providencia, she spends a night always with Mrs. Douglas in San Bernabé, while the diligence puts up in the ranch inn; and Mary is rejoiced to find that she is again whole and hearty in her enjoyment of life.

During the next holidays she is to spend a week in the little parsonage at the ranch, and assist at the wedding of her cousin José and Refugio. Refugio will then leave her who has sheltered her from the day when she came to her, foot-sore and sick, from over the mountains, and will go to live in the Vera home, in Mary's old rooms there.

A great friendship has arisen between Refugio and Angela, and José willingly resigns the palm to his cousin in the matter of organ-playing.

Angela has not yet become a Protestant in name, although there is little doubt of her inclination in

that direction, and Mary well knows that the prayers to the virgin and the saints have long become a matter of the past.

All natures do not yield with equal readiness to the gentle influences of the Spirit of Christ, and sometimes the most obstinate in cleaving to the wrong become the firmest and most faithful for the right, when once convinced of error.

San Bernabé was not converted in one month, nor in one year. One by one, now and then, the church grows in numbers, and the little school, Refugio's now, is the only one in the ranch, and a new house has been built for it. Much of the opposition against "the new religion" has died away, though there are still those who go their weary way across the plain to Sunday mass at the church in La Bienvenida.

And so the work goes on, and will go on, as long as men and women love their God and their neighbor, and believe the truth, that "no work truly done, no word earnestly spoken, no sacrifice freely made, was ever made in vain."

THE END.

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